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WILL SOMERS, THE BOY DETECTIVE.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.



"SHALL I LAY YOU OUT A PIECE OF THIS? IT'S DOG CHEAP, JUST LOOK AT THAT STUFF."

Will Somers,

THE BOY DETECTIVE.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

LOOKING FOR WORK.

"Got any opening in these diggin's for a feller of my size and good looks?"

The speaker was a boy of some sixteen years of age, a well-built, athletic lad, the sinewy development of his limbs showing through more than one rent in his well-worn clothes.

His claim to good looks was indisputable. A bright black eye gave character to a face of classical outline, straggling curls of dark hair hanging low over his olive-hued cheeks and brow, while his nose and mouth had all the fine curves of the Grecian type.

"What do you want?" asked the gentleman addressed, in a curt tone.

"Well, I ain't partik'lar," drawled the boy. "I want a job. Most anything will do. Say cashier, or head clerk."

The merchant twisted himself around in his chair and looked at the speaker. The latter bore his sharp look unabashed, standing in an erect, easy attitude.

"Suppose I don't want a cashier?"

"Maybe then you'd give me a job to make fires and run errands."

"Who told you I wanted a boy?"

"A counter-jumper outside there. I axed him if there was room in this row for a smart young man, and he said he guessed you wanted a partner. So I jest stepped back to see if I wouldn't suit."

A frown came upon the merchant's brow as he heard of this impudent action of one of his clerks.

"Who told you this?" he sharply asked.

"Now look ye here, mister," said the boy, impressively; "that's not my lay. I don't tell tales out of school. I wouldn't blow on a cat if I caught her stealing a mouse in another man's kitchen."

"Get out of here then. I am busy and don't want to be bothered."

"See here now," said the boy, leisurely seating himself in a chair. "You're not sayin' nothing about that job. You've got a dozen men out there in the store, and I don't see a boy in the shanty. Now you can't run a place like this without a wide-awake boy, and I'm jest the feller you want."

"You have impudence enough to run it yourself," said the merchant, looking more closely at his importunate visitor.

"Wouldn't be afeard to try," said the boy, saucily, putting to his lips a half-smoked cigar which he had all this time held in his hand, and taking a long whiff. "I've a notion I could make dry-goods spin amazing. Jest hand me the reins and I bet I put her through at two-forty."

The merchant laid aside the papers which he had been examining. He pushed back his chair from the table and faced his visitor.

He was a hale, handsome man of some fifty years of age, somewhat imperious in manner, but with a strong sense of humor in his face. He seemed to think that he had met an original character.

"What is your name?" asked the merchant.

"Will Somers."

"Where do you live?"

"In this here big town of Philadelphia, but in a little street that I s'pose you never heered the name of. I make myself at home anywhere, though."

"So it seems," said the merchant, glancing at the handsome appointments of his private office, and then at the ragged dress of the boy.

"It's only my coat and pants that's torn," said the latter, with an air of pride. "I'm all right inside,

I bet there's not a coon in these diggin's can jump further, run faster, or lift more than me. And I never seen the day yet I was afeard of work? Now how about that job, mister?"

"Leonard," said the merchant.

"Mr. Leonard, I mean. I've been a-waiting to get holt of the north end of your name."

The merchant looked closely at his precocious visitor, who, to the age of a boy, added the self-assertion and experience of a grown man. The latter leaned back with easy assurance in his chair, and seemed indeed "at home."

"What have you been used to doing?" asked Mr. Leonard.

"What ain't I been used to would be a bit more like it," said Will, resting his two elbows on the table. "Blackin' boots, and sellin' papers, and holdin' hosses has been my big bolts, but I've dipped into 'most everything else 'cept preaching."

"You have been a little vagabond, I suppose, all your life, and know as much of the world as men ought to at twenty-five."

"If there's a feller inside of ten miles of here that says I ever done anything mean, I can lick that feller; that's me!" cried Will, indignantly.

"Do you know Philadelphia well?"

"Does a cat know milk? Bet I do. Could navigate it with my eyes shet."

"Are your parents living?"

"Dunno 'bout my dad," said Will. "'Spect I'm an orphan. Me and sis was drapped in this here town when we was like young kittens. A big white house, t'other side the Schuylkill, was our headquarters. Dad sloped. Never heered of him since."

"The poor-house, eh?" said Mr. Leonard. "You have a sister?"

"Yes. She's slipped, too. Was took out when I was a baby. Never see'd her since. Hope the girl's sound. Know I've had mighty hard hoein'."

There was a touch of feeling in Will's voice which he sought to hide by greater recklessness of manner. Evidently he had a secret yearning for his lost sister.

Mr. Leonard was silent for several minutes before again speaking. He seemed to be debating something within himself.

"So you want to learn something of business?" he at length said.

"You've hit that nail square on the head," said Will, with energy. "I'm gettin' too big to shove the brush, or handle the extras. What's more, I'm not goin' to be a poor critter all my life. I want a bizz that's got money in it. I've sot my eye on a brown-stone shanty up Broad street. If it's for sale ten years from now I'm in the market."

Mr. Leonard laughed slightly at the boy's tone of confidence.

"Fortunes ain't made as quickly as you fancy, my lad," he said.

"If I don't hang my hat up in that shanty, you can count me out," said Will.

"The saucy young rascal has the making of a business man in him," said Mr. Leonard, to himself. "I would much rather have a boy that aimed high than one that aimed low. He is a handsome lad, too, and if better dressed would be quite presentable. I have half a notion to try him, with all his impudence. He is a perfect specimen of the street Arab, but he seems quick and intelligent."

"How about that job?" asked Will, impatiently. "I'm bound to strike one, somewhere, afore night. I've give you the refusal. The man that gets me makes a ten-strike, and no braggin'."

"If I should give you employment could I depend on you to do what you were told?"

"What I was told?" said Will, rising impulsively to his feet. "I wouldn't give a smashed cent for the feller who couldn't do more than he was told."

"That would never do," replied Mr. Leonard. "I want a boy to do just as he is told."

"And what chance is there for genius, then, if a feller can't spread a little?" asked Will, earnestly.

"The boy that only does what he's told won't never get to Congress."

"And they who act beyond their instructions sometimes get to the State's prison, my boy. If I give you a position you must learn to never take a step without orders."

"I can try," said Will, with a comical leer, "but it'll go mighty ag'in' the grain."

Their conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance of a person into the office.

He seemed to be one of Mr. Leonard's employes, and was a tall, well built man, but dressed with a foppish vanity that at once attracted the boy's attention.

He looked with surprise at the merchant's strange visitor, a look of disdain coming upon his face, as he drew somewhat back, as if in fear of contamination. Will glanced at him from head to foot, with a steady, impudent stare.

"The Everhart is in," he said. "The Danton shipment of silks on board. I have just received notice."

"That is good news, Wilson," replied Mr. Leonard. "The market is just ready for them. See to the custom-house charges at once. We must have them in store as soon as possible."

"I will attend to it," he said with a somewhat pompous air.

With another look of supercilious wonder at Will he left the room.

"Who's that cove?" asked the latter.

"That is Mr. Augustus Wilson, my principal book-keeper."

"He is a hoss, he is," said Will, with a contemptuous puff. "A man of his size dressed like a peacock, and biting off his words like a school-girl. I bet he's a dose."

"If I should give you employment, Will, you must learn to curb your tongue, and not be so insolent to the men in the store. They would not stand impudence from a boy."

"I'll get along with them. Don't you be afeard," said Will, with a look of confidence on his handsome face. "I've got along with folks all my life, and never been kicked yet. But I'm doubtful if I won't be callin' that cove Gus. He's a gay feller to Mister, he is."

"You will not stay here long, my lad, if you do. I warn you of that. He is my principal employe, and must be treated with respect. Understand me. Impudence will not serve."

"All right, Mr. Leonard. But I know I'll have a fight every time I go to say Mister. Gus will be coming up. When am I to take hold?"

"Come round this hour to-morrow and I will let you know my decision," said Mr. Leonard, turning again to his papers.

"That won't gee," said Will, positively. "If you want me you'd best say so and be done with it. I'm bound to fetch work to-day."

"Very well," said the merchant, impatiently. "I will give you a trial. Now don't bother me any further."

"If you'd said that half an hour ago I wouldn't bothered you so long," said Will, saucily, as he strode out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

STORE LIFE.

MR. LEONARD was the proprietor of a large wholesale dry-goods house, on Market street. He dealt extensively in the richer qualities of goods, and cases of costly silks, rich shawls, and other expensive fabrics were constantly imported by him.

There were a dozen or more salesmen, porters, etc., employed about the store, besides the numerous clerks in the counting-house, and in the business hours of the day the long, wide store bustled with activity till it seemed a very bee-hive of commerce.

A few days after his interview with Mr. Leonard found our young hero duly installed as office-boy

and general utility in the store. His employer had found him a more creditable suit of clothes, and given him some useful instruction as to personal cleanliness, politeness, etc.

He had succeeded in greatly improving the outward appearance of the boy, but his mental crookedness was not to be so easily straightened. Will was essentially the same lad who had spent his life till now in street avocations, with intervals of fishing, lounging, swimming, fighting and saucing.

He took hold of business with a vim that promised well for his future usefulness, doing the work given him so rapidly and well as to greatly please his employer.

But there was no curbing his tongue, and more than one spat occurred between him and the salesmen, before he had been a day in the store. Before the end of the first week there was an outbreak which threatened to end his engagement.

"Here, boy, take this roll of cloth down to the store and give it to Mr. Johnson. Look alive, now, he is waiting for it."

This imperative address was made by a nervous, quick-spoken salesman, named Robert Brown.

Will was employed in opening a case of goods. He looked up with a glance of disdain.

"I've took in another job," he said. "Ain't doin' two things at once. You know the way down. Tote it down yourself."

"What do you mean, you young rascal?" cried the man, in a passion. "If you stay in this place you will have to do what you are told or you'll be helped. Take this down at once."

"What's goin' to happen if I don't?" said Will, dropping the tool he had been using.

"I'll send you spinning down-stairs and out of the store door in a hurry," said the man, still fuming.

"Look here, Mr. Brown, or Bob Brown, if you like it better, maybe you don't know that you're barking up the wrong tree," said Will, insolently. "Ordering ain't in my line. Ask me like a gentleman and I'll stand on my head for you; but I'm not a feller that's used to bein' kicked by any man's toe or tongue, either."

"Then you won't take it down?"

"I'll see you so far t'other side of nowhere that a forty-horse team couldn't draw you back in a lifetime, afore I'll take it an inch."

Will returned to his former task of opening the case.

Mr. Brown's face was purple with rage, and the veins stood out on his forehead, as he listened to this unexampled rebellion.

"Why, you ragged young reprobate, who was only brought here by charity!" he cried, hotly. "Hang me if I don't kick you down-stairs myself, and fling the goods after you!"

Suiting the action to the word he grasped Will with a nervous grip, and sought to hustle him to the head of the stairs.

But if ever man caught a Tartar, Mr. Brown had done so in this action.

Will lifted the iron tool in his hand with an impulse to strike his assailant. With another impulse he threw it from him, and used his sinewy limbs with a vigor which Mr. Brown had not dreamed of his possessing.

In a moment he had torn loose from his grasp, and by an alert trip had stretched his foe on his back on the floor.

"That's the way I pile up my shingles!" cried Will exultingly. "Come to time, old hoss. I've chawed up better men than you."

The language of the street, which he had partly laid aside, came back to Will in his excitement.

The furious salesman sprung to his feet and rushed at the boy with clinched fists. Two other men, who had been engaged with them on the third floor of the building, hurried up.

"Hold there, Bob!" cried one of these. "Don't try that on a boy."

"Let him alone," said Will, as he deftly parried

his blows. "He's my meat. I wasn't brung up on free fights to back down from a counter-hopper."

But the man who had spoken pushed between and separated them, just as Will planted his fist with a stinging blow on Brown's left cheek.

"Come, come, Bob!" said the peacemaker, "that's no way to settle disputes with a boy. If the fellow has been impudent report him to Mr. Leonard, but never try your fists on a boy."

Mr. Brown did report, and Will was sent for to Mr. Leonard's office. Our hero proved a very poor hand at giving evidence in his own favor, but the men who had separated them described the whole occurrence.

"Don't let anything like this happen again," said Mr. Leonard, after lecturing Will, severely. "Mr. Brown placed himself in the wrong or I would have to discharge you. Don't misuse the confidence I have placed in you."

"All right," said Will, independently. "But the man that tries to wipe his feet on me is goin' to touch ground with his nose, that's all."

This episode did not injure Will's standing in the store, for Mr. Brown was not a general favorite.

His good-humor and willingness to work soon gained him friends, and faults were excused in him that would have proved fatal otherwise to his position.

He had a fine voice, and sung ditties with wonderful vim. He could dance like a negro minstrel, could tumble like an acrobat, and had more tricks than a circus clown.

Nothing pleased him better than to get on one of the upper floors, out of sight of customers, and treat the admiring clerks to a taste of his quality.

His chief trouble, in such cases, sprung from the new clothes in which Mr. Leonard had dressed him.

"It's a gallus rig. I'll give in," he said, "but I ain't been used to fancy fixin's. There goes the coat, and here goes the vest, and up go the sleeves, and now I'm in trim for work. P'int out what you want done and I'm in."

"Nothing just now, Will. Let us have that ole Virginny break-down."

"Yes, I see myself waltzing round on my ear for you, and no pianner music, and not even a jews-harp. Don't dance till I hear a tune. Whistle up, somebody, my boot-soles is itching."

One of the men whistled a quick tune, and Will's feet rattled over the floor in the most astonishing steps, relieving his feelings now and then by a somerset, or a dance on his hands.

"Hi, lads! let the music out," he cried. "That's your style! Heel and toe. Ain't I a screamer? Just observe me."

The next instant he was at the top of a high step-ladder, singing a negro melody for dear life, and keeping time with hands and feet on the boards.

"Hush! here comes Mr. Leonard," cried a scout. "He has heard all that rascally noise. Limber up and get to work *quick*."

The men hastened to various avocations, somewhat to Will's surprise. He was as honest as the sun, and would never have thought of such deceit. He had, all his life, fathered all his actions.

When Mr. Leonard appeared Will was seated in his shirt-sleeves on a dry-goods box, whistling in a low tone, and keeping time with his heels.

Mr. Leonard looked inquiringly around, a look of displeasure on his face.

"What has been going on here!" he asked, sharply. "I heard an uproar all the way down to my office. You are all suddenly at work. What have you been doing, boy?"

"Nothing. Only killing time," said Will, indifferently. "We kinder run out of work, and I wanted to learn these fellows a South street wharf break-down. Want to see me do it?"

Will jumped from his box and struck an attitude.

"No. And I want less noise and commotion. If you wish to stay in my employment you must learn to curb yourself a little. Let us have no more such performances."

"You suit me fu'st-rate so fur. Got no notion of dischargin' you yet," said Will. "But what's to be done? I can't hold in. It's out of the question. There'd be something bu'st sure."

"Well," said Mr. Leonard, turning on his heel to hide a broad smile, "I must give you some out-door work—send you on errands. Can I trust you to do them correctly?"

"I dunno. Won't make no promises. You can try me. That's the way to find out. I know everything and everybody out of doors; that's something."

"Very well; I will try you."

Thenceforth Will varied his store duties with out-door avocations, his quick and intelligent performance of which gave much satisfaction.

CHAPTER III.

MR. LEONARD'S VISITOR.

It was two or three days after the last-narrated events that a slender, keen-eyed person stopped in front of Mr. Leonard's store. He was dressed in grayish clothes, and wore a wide-rimmed hat.

He glanced up at the lofty iron front, reaching five stories high, and then briskly entered the store, threading his way back between the open cases of goods which covered the long floor to the counting-house.

Sending in his card he was at once admitted to Mr. Leonard's private office.

"Take a seat, Mr. Fidler," said Mr. Leonard, pushing aside his papers.

Rising, he carefully closed the door and seated himself near the visitor.

"You received my message, then?"

"Yes, sir. You have need of my services?"

"I wish your advice, at any rate. But first, does any of my men know you?"

"I think not. I know none of them."

"I have here an invoice of silks shipped me from Lyons, France, by Danton & Co. There were two cases of these goods, valued, as you see, at ten thousand dollars. The ship Everhart, which had them in freight, reached Philadelphia two weeks ago. Her cargo was duly discharged, and the goods deposited in the Government warehouse."

"Why not brought at once to your store?" asked Mr. Fidler, drumming with his fingers on the table.

"Such was my intention, and I directed my confidential clerk, Mr. Wilson, to pay the duties, and see that they were brought here. He did the first, and obtained the Government order for their delivery, which was locked up in my presence, in the fire-proof there. He was hindered from doing the second by news of the death of a near relative in Harrisburg, whose funeral he was obliged to attend."

"I perceive. What next?" said Mr. Fidler.

"A few words will conclude. On his return yesterday he went to the safe for the custom-house delivery-order. It was gone."

"Were you present?"

"Yes."

"Had you seen it in his absence?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Only for a full statement of facts."

"You will please understand that no possible suspicion attaches to Mr. Wilson, even if his absence did not preclude it. He has been in my service for ten years, and is incorruptible."

"Certainly," said Mr. Fidler, in an indiffrent tone. "Somebody else has taken it. But that is not all?"

"No. I have just learned that the order was presented at the bonded warehouse last Tuesday by a gentlemanly-dressed person, accompanied by a drayman. The necessary entries were made, and the goods delivered."

"And where are they now?"

"That is what I want to find out."

"This is a bold robbery, Mr. Leonard," said the visitor, with energy. "It looks very much as if the black sheep was in your own store. Is there any one whom you suspect?"

"There is none."

"Who has access to your safe?"

"Any of my book keepers. Three or four of them are obliged to enter my office, in my absence, in the regular discharge of their duties."

"What is the record of these three or four men?"

"The best. They are all steady, quiet business men, married and living moderately. I know them all well."

"These smooth-watered wells are sometimes very deep," said Mr. Fidler. "Have you any new hands?"

"Yes. One, whom I took on two weeks ago."

"Ha!" said the visitor, interested. "Could he enter your office without suspicion?"

"He could. I have employed him as a messenger."

"Every confidence in him, too?"

"I think him thoroughly honest."

"You have too much trust in human nature, Mr. Leonard," said his visitor, with a shrug. "If you were in my profession you would have very little. I would like to see this new hand. Can you call him in on some pretense?"

"You have seen him. He is the messenger I sent for you."

"What? That boy? He in your employment? Well, that beats!" Mr. Fidler leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily but silently.

"Do you know him?" asked Mr. Leonard, with some displeasure.

"Know him? I should think so. Who don't know Willful Will? That is his street name. Why, I thought you had picked him up at your door and sent him after me. He did look strange at me. I never saw him in a whole suit of clothes before. The idea of his settling down to steady business! Just call him in; I would like to talk with him."

"He is not in at present. I sent him this morning, out to my residence, near Germantown."

"Is Mr. Wilson at hand?"

"Yes. I will call him."

Mr. Leonard went to the door of the office and asked for Mr. Wilson. The latter was in the counting-room, and immediately entered.

The keen eyes of the visitor were fixed on him as he came in, taking in at a glance, as it seemed, every detail of his face, form and dress.

"Mr. Wilson, this is Mr. Fidler, a detective officer from the central station," said the merchant. "I have sent for him to investigate that affair of the robbery."

"I hope he can help us in it," said Mr. Wilson, as he quietly seated himself.

"The rascals were wide-awake, Mr. Wilson," said the detective, "in taking advantage of your trip to Harrisburg. Was the fact that you had paid the duties and could not attend to taking the goods out of bond talked about in the store?"

"It was no secret in the counting-room," said Mr. Wilson.

"What is your opinion of the book-keepers, sir?"

"I have full confidence in them. They are only men, to be sure, and may have talked outside."

"Could the store have been entered at night?"

"No, no," said Mr. Leonard. "Nothing has been tampered with. The order was stolen in the daytime, while the safe was open."

"How does the store-keeper at the bonded warehouse describe the parties who took away the goods?"

"In a very vague fashion," replied Mr. Wilson.

"He could not have noticed them closely. His description did not remind me of anybody I knew."

Mr. Fidler watched him as he spoke, seeming attracted by his foppish dress and stilted manner of speaking.

"I will see the store-keeper myself," he answered. "It is unlucky that you were called away at such a time, Mr. Wilson. Was it a near relative?"

"A first cousin," he replied.

"Ah! I am somewhat acquainted in Harrisburg. What name, pray?"

"Miles Saitain," answered Mr. Wilson, with composure.

"The name is not familiar. I thought I might have known him," said the officer carelessly.

"I will drop in myself to-morrow, and look round," he continued. "You may not know me, but don't be surprised if a stranger makes himself at home. I will see the store-keeper this afternoon, and will set the police authorities to work to try and trace these missing goods."

He bowed himself out of the office, leaving Mr. Wilson and his employer in busy conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

WILL MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

MEANWHILE Willful Will, as the officer had called him, was on his way to Mr. Leonard's country-seat. He bore a note addressed to a Miss Jennie Arlington, a resident of the merchant's house, which he was directed to deliver into her own hands without delay, and wait for any return message.

The mansion was a broad-fronted, brown-stone edifice, richly ornamented, and surrounded with beautifully-kept grounds, in which now a host of flowers were in bloom.

Seen from the front, through the vailing screen of leaves and blossoms, it seemed an abode of wealth and taste very attractive to any artistic eye. Even Will paused for five minutes, in a day-dream, gazing in. The boy was not without the poetic instinct.

He was stirred from his reverie by the approach of a servant-woman to the gate.

"Say, you there," cried Will, as she turned back. "This Mr. Leonard's?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"All square, then. I want to see Jennie."

"See who?" asked the woman, in surprise.

"Jennie. You know. Can't go her last name. Slipped clean out of my head."

"Miss Arlington is not in. You can't see her," said the woman.

"Bet a hoss that I will," he replied, positively.

"Mr. Leonard didn't send me here on a fool's errand. Where is she?"

"What do you want? I will give her your errand when she comes in."

"Maybe so, when you get it," said Will, mysteriously. "Hope you don't kalkerlate to pick up secrets that easy. There's things it don't do for everybody to know. Where is the gal?"

"She is down there in the wood," said the servant.

Breaking into a gay ditty, Will hastened off toward the piece of woodland indicated by the woman.

The ground sloped downward from the back of the house into a wide depression that led off toward the Schuylkill. This was occupied by a piece of fine woodland, the trees growing straight and tall, while the undergrowth had been mostly removed, leaving long, green vistas.

The country was now arrayed in all its June-tide beauty, while flowers lent a rich charm to the fields, and the fresh green of spring arrayed every tree.

The old vagabond instinct rose in him as he sauntered on, now chasing a gorgeous butterfly, now following the flight of some swift bird, now stopping to listen to a trill of woodland music, now taking a wild roll in the grass.

His cap was soon adorned with daisies and buttercups; violets peeped from his button-holes, and he gathered a bouquet of yellow dandelions as if he thought them choice flowers.

"If this ain't gay I don't know beans!" he cried, exultingly. "Wouldn't I like to live out here! Bet I'd go a-fishin' every day, and a-swimmin' every other. I'll go a hoss there ain't a tree in that woods I can't climb. Got a notion to shin up some of them just for fun."

But a frisking ground-squirrel took his attention, and drove out of his head the project of tree-climbing.

This fellow chased to his hole, other objects at-

tracted Will's delighted eyes, and led him step by step into the woods.

Finally, some sounds behind a thin screen of bushes attracted his notice. He drew carefully up and looked through. There on a flat stone, beside a flowing brook, sat a young lady, her lap full of wild flowers, which she was forming into a bouquet.

She seemed quite young, at furthest not more than eighteen, and was very beautiful as she sat there all unconscious of stranger's eyes. She was tall and well formed, with a face of most classic outline—the general contour of the features not unlike Will's own. But the cheek had a peachy bloom which his had long lost, and a gentle, womanly expression replaced his saucy independence.

"Sell me out if she ain't a beauty!" said Will enthusiastically. "Them long curls is scrumptious. Wonder if she's my game? I'll give her a start, just for fun."

Placing his two hands to his mouth the woods rung with a long, clear call of "Jennie!"

The girl sprung up, dropping most of her flowers, and looked round in alarm.

"Jennie!" again rung out in Will's deep, musical tones.

"Who calls?" she said, with parted lips, standing like a statue of flight.

Her question was answered by a crash in the bushes, and the appearance of a figure coming with a double somerset into her presence.

"You, Jennie?" asked Will, standing suddenly on his feet before her.

She looked at the sturdy, handsome lad with a look in which trepidation was mingled with amusement.

"I am Miss Arlington," she replied, with dignity. "What do you mean by calling me in that manner, and coming into a lady's presence like a mountebank?"

"That's the way I always come in," said Will, impressively. "And you looked so pretty sitting there I wanted to give you a start."

"Don't do it again. It is not manly behavior," she replied. "What do you want with me?"

"I've got a 'pistle," said Will, fumbling in his pockets, "that Mr. Leonard giv me for you."

"Mr. Leonard? Are you the new store-boy that he has told me of?" she asked, as she opened the letter.

"Been a-talkin' about me, has he?" asked Will. "Hope he ain't gone back on me. Bet he can't find jist sich another in these diggin's."

"He said that you were a good intentioned boy, and that he might make something of you, if he could only cure you of your impudence."

"Well, that's clever in him. Mebbe he don't know the job he's takin' in. Mought jist as well try to cure a grapevine from twisting."

"Come with me to the house," said Miss Arlington, on reading the letter. "I am to send a package back by you."

"Lucky it ain't a cook-stove, or something else nice and handy to carry," said Will, as he walked on beside his new acquaintance. "Live with Mr. Leonard?"

"I do."

"How old mought you be?" asked Will, earnestly. "That is no question to ask a lady," she replied, with a smile.

"Oh, we're not playin' gentleman and lady; we're playin' boy and gal. You're not come out yet, or not engaged, or nothin' of that nonsense, are you?"

"That is another question that you have no business to ask."

"I'd like to know how I'd ever learn anything if I didn't ask questions? That's the way I come to be so wide-awake."

The young lady, who had been a little angry at his questions, could not help laughing.

"You are an odd boy," she said. "If I was in want of a confidant I might accept you. I will tell you this much; I am engaged."

"Well, now, that's bad," said Will. "Can't you break with the feller? Give him the sack. Tell him you've a notion to go to Californy, and don't want no company. Sling him somehow."

"Why should I?" she asked, turning her brilliant brown eyes on Will.

"Now, don't look at me that way or I can't tell you," he said, with affected bashfulness. "Jist turn your eyes away for a minute."

"Well, go on," she replied, turning away.

"I like you, gal, and there's no joke in that. Can't you jist sling the other feller, and wait for me? I'm goin' to be a rich man, you can bet on that."

"Do you want an answer now?" she asked, in a constrained tone.

"If it comes handy to you, I'd just as lieve."

"Here it is, then," she replied, giving him a ringing box on the ear.

With a laugh she sprung through the gate, which they had just reached, and hurried into the house, leaving Will completely crestfallen.

She did not reappear, but sent a servant with the package which Will was to take back. He trudged off reflectively toward the cars.

"Got served right, I s'pose," he said, "for I was imperdent. But I ain't done with the gal yet. Bet I give her as good as she sent."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

"I do not know what to make of this," said Mr. Leonard, as he sat with a bank-book and a package of canceled checks in his hand. "I am positive that my account is not overdrawn. This settlement makes me five hundred dollars short, where I should have at least one thousand dollars to my credit."

"It is very strange," said Mr. Wilson. "We have never found an error in our account with the Mechanic's Bank before."

"They paid my check without hesitation?"

"Certainly. They would have paid it if it had been ten thousand. Your credit is unsullied."

"I don't understand this, and don't like it," said Mr. Leonard, gravely. "Let us go over these checks and deposits. The bank may be in error. I have here my private check-book, which Will has just brought from my house; I think it likely some personal check of mine may have gone to the wrong bank. Call off the checks, and I will compare them with the check-book entries."

They proceeded to do so. Mr. Leonard taking the memoranda and his bookkeeper called out the amounts and dates of the checks.

"Fifteen hundred and seventy-three," he repeated. "I don't find that. What date is it?"

"May 23d."

"Are you sure? There is no such check of that date in either book. To whose order is it drawn?"

"To Gilbert, Cook & Co., or bearer," said Mr. Wilson, looking up with a glance in which a doubt was struggling.

"But we owed them no such amount. They were paid in full on the 15th," said Mr. Leonard, in excitement. "And they never would have asked for a check to be drawn to *bearer*. Let me see that."

He snatched it out of Mr. Wilson's hand, in his excitement.

"By Heaven!" cried the merchant, rising hastily to his feet. "I never wrote that signature. It is a forgery."

The two men looked at each other with half afrighted glances.

"Can it be possible?" cried Mr. Wilson.

"Possible? It is a fact!" was the vehement answer. "The signature is good. I might be deceived by it myself, only that I know I did not write it. This is a bad business, Wilson."

"A terribly bad business," was the reply. "Who could have done it? There is a black sheep in our midst."

"Can there be?" said the merchant, turning pale

as he thought of the late robbery from his safe. "Do you suspect any one?"

"No one but yourself, sir," said Wilson, in his stilted manner. "I suspect you of undue faith in human nature. If you choose to take into your store a street boy of notorious character, what can you expect?"

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Leonard, in arms for his *protege*.

"I mean that that boy's coming here was not without an object. I suspected from the first that he might have been sent here as the tool of some designing knaves, who knew your easy disposition."

"You have no right to talk this way Wilson."

"Indeed I have," said the clerk, with energy. "There is plainly a thief in your store. Yet the character of everybody here has been proved by years of trust. Two weeks ago you introduced here a boy of very doubtful antecedents, and in that two weeks two serious robberies have been consummated. What is the natural conclusion?"

"Where is the boy? Let us have him here," said Mr. Leonard, moving angrily to the door.

"No, no! that is no way to act," cried Wilson. "He is a keen knave; you will put him on his guard."

"You are right, I was going to act hastily. It does look suspicious for the boy. But I cannot believe him guilty without positive evidence."

"You must go a different way to get it. Give this matter to the detective, along with the other. I warrant he will make something of it."

"I will do so," said Mr. Leonard. "This troubles me sadly, Wilson. After fifteen years of business to find myself suddenly the sport of a daring thief and forger. What can be done?"

"Nothing, but to watch and wait," said Wilson, calmly. "I do suspect that boy. I firmly believe that he is the stool-pigeon of some bold and expert villains. I see nothing we can do now but to have him closely watched, and learn all his associations. That the detective can do far better than we."

"We will leave it in his hands, then," said Mr. Leonard, closing his check-book with a determined snap.

Meanwhile the subject of this conversation was giving a touch of his quality to the salesmen.

"Say what you please," he remarked, "but Mr. Leonard does live gay. Never seen a finer shanty; and there's no end to the roses and posies around it. Had a high old run through the woods, and come across a highfalutin' gal, you bet."

"Did you fall in love with her?"

"Maybe so; though I can't see it's any of your biz. She was scrumptious, I tell you. She lives with Mr. Leonard. The old man had his back up when I come back, 'cause I staid so long."

"He laid you out then?"

"He told me I had to finish counting them Milton cloths. I told him the store would be shut up afore I got half through. He said he couldn't help that, it was my fault for staying so long."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I'm goin' to count them, if it takes me all night."

"You needn't mind them. They have already been counted," said Mr. Johnson, a salesman who had approached during this talk. "Mr. Leonard will let you free from the task."

"Mebbe he'd best wait till he's asked!" said Will, resolutely. "I don't blow hot and cold with no man, and I don't let no man blow hot and cold with me. He laid it onto me heavier than suits me, and now I'm going to let him see that I can do as I'm told. I don't keer if everybody in the store has counted them cloths. That's my job and I'm bound to put her through."

Will hastened to the cellar stairs, and down into the basement, where the cases of cloth in question stood, freshly opened.

He labored on an hour, for two hours, in lifting the heavy rolls of cloths from the cases, counting, and replacing them. It was quite dark here, and he

lit the gas at the start. He did not, in fact, know how long he had been engaged, when the light suddenly dimmed and went out.

Will stood in almost utter darkness, only a faint light entering at the narrow window. He ran to turn off the gas, not understanding what put it out. As he did so he heard the clang of a door overhead.

The truth rushed to his mind. The store had been shut and fastened, the gas turned off as usual at night, and everybody had gone home, quite forgetting that he was still in the cellar.

Will was inclined to be superstitious, and a sense of fright came upon him as he found himself alone in this lonely, dark room. He groped his way to the stairs and tried the door. It was firmly bolted. All his efforts could not move it. He called out at the top of his voice, but no answer came back.

"I'm a reg'lar rat in a cage," he muttered, as he made his way to the windows, thinking to break a pane and call for help. But they faced on a deserted alley, and he feared if even he should bring aid, it would only be to be arrested as a thief.

"I wonder if there is any ghosts in these diggin's, as some of the men say?" he muttered, looking fearfully around. "I don't like it a bit. I've never been in such a 'tarnal scrape in my life. Blame their eyes, they know'd I was down here, why didn't they call me up? I believe it was done a-purpose. If I don't be even with some of them yet, you can sell me."

But even a cornered coward grows brave, and Will was no coward. The superstitious dread could not long hold the mastery over his bold spirit. It was not long before he threw off the fears which had troubled him.

"I ain't no baby, to be skeered by a shadder," he said. "Let what will come I'm goin' to have a snooze anyhow. I dunno what's the reason a feller couldn't sleep as sound here as in my little eight-by-ten hole at home! Bet I make a soft bed, and that there ain't no ghost pr sich bothers itself to waken me up."

The bed did not lack softness, after he had opened and spread out yard after yard of rich, soft goods on the floor, using some of the heavy cloths he had been counting as a substratum.

But his slumbers were not sound, for reasons which we have not space to give here. What Will saw, and what happened to him that night in the gloomy cellar, must be left for future chapters to declare.

CHAPTER VI.

WILL'S FIRST SALE.

No one in Mr. Leonard's establishment was aware of the fact that a rat of a new species had made free that night with the contents of the cellar. Will, for reasons of his own, kept his adventure secret, appearing in the store the next morning as if he had just walked in from the street.

It had not been so easy to remove the traces of his rough usage of the goods, and he had spent considerable time in smoothing and folding the cloths and the richer and more fragile materials which had served him for a bed.

Something had happened which he considered it important to keep secret, and he went about his duties with a vim intended to prove that there was no weight on his mind, but that he was as fresh and free from care as a daisy.

"Here, Will," called Mr. Johnson. "You are wanted front."

"All right," returned Will, cheerfully. "I'm the lad for your money if it's anything under a ton weight to carry."

It was out of the question, however, for him to proceed soberly through the store. He went at something like a bat's flight, taking a case of goods in his way at a leap.

There were several dray-loads of goods unloading, and he was busily occupied for an hour. He was just at leisure again when he observed a person who

had at that moment entered the store, and seemed to be looking around for a salesman.

He was a middle-aged person, who seemed from his dress and general appearance to be from the country, and not much used to city ways.

Above his flaming red necktie was a face of mingled simplicity and shrewdness, a beard of a week's growth, covering the lower portion of his visage, while flax-like hair escaped from under his wide-brimmed felt hat and straggled over his forehead.

Will looked around for a salesman. There was none near. This was a difficulty he was not long in overcoming. He was intending to learn the whole business. Why not begin now?

"Calculatin' to invest in dry-goods?" he said, addressing the stranger.

"Why, I'd like to buy a small bill of goods," said the man, with a slow, hesitating accent.

"Hitch hosses, then, and come along here. I'm the man you want. What'll you have to-day? Silks, shawls, dress goods? Got some fine new styles aboard. See here, this is jist the article you want, to a thread."

In a trice Will had partly unrolled a rich fabric of the most delicate shades of color.

"Shall I lay you out a piece of this? It's dog cheap. Just look at that stuff! Did you ever see anything as handsome? You can feel it, too, if your fingers are clean. Every spot on that would be a dollar out of pocket. How many pieces did you say?"

"No, no," said the customer, with difficulty restraining Will's flow of words. "Silks don't sell down our way. I'd like to look at the calicoes."

"The what?" said Will, starting back in open-mouthed astonishment.

"The calicoes," said the man, hesitating, as if he feared he had made a serious blunder.

"Look ye here," said Will, touching his arm in a patronizing manner. "What part of Uncle Sam's farm might you be from?"

"I'm from Woodenville, down in Bucks county," said the customer, drawing back in a timid manner.

"Kalkerlated so," replied Will. "Vote for General Jackson last 'lection?"

"See here, boy," said the man, a little angrily, "we don't allow no one to poke fun at us down our way!"

"All right, boss; don't get your back up. I'd a notion they always run the old general down that way. But, ain't you got into the wrong cornfield? Does this shanty look like a calico-shop?"

"Not much," said the man, looking round. "You may have some goods, though, to suit me. We keep a few choice dress goods."

"Knowed you did," said Will, confidently. "See'd it in your eye at first sight. Knowed you wasn't no ten-cent calicoer. Can show you goods from fifty cents a yard to fifty dollars. Trot down this way. I'll make your eyes water."

Will, proud of his new position, worked his man diligently around the store, showing him a variety of goods, and asking him a greater variety of questions, about the state of the crops, what kind of poultry he preferred, banty or game, how much corn it took to fatten pigs, etc.

He seemed to have suddenly developed a powerful desire for agricultural news, and his customer answered him as if pleased with his interest.

"I'll have my bill now, please," said the man, after selecting several pieces of dress goods.

"That's an inch or two out of my line," answered Will. "The fellers in the office will put that through. This way. Got to report at the captain's office."

The clerks looked rather wonderingly at Will's ushering a customer into the office, and proceeding with much dignity to introduce him, and report the items of his purchase to the entry-clerk.

Meanwhile the country customer walked lazily about the office, asking simple questions of this one and that, and waiting for their replies, with eyes fixed on their faces as intently as if much hung on the response.

"Who did you say kept this store?" he asked of a younger man who was intently engaged on a huge ledger.

"Mr. Leonard," was the short answer.

"Leonard, hey? I used to know Leonards. Anything to the Bucks county Leonards?"

"I don't know," snapped the clerk.

"What might his first name be?"

"Henry," said the clerk, plunging again into his figures.

"Henry. Reckon I know him, then. Is he in?"

"Your bill is ready, sir," said another clerk, accosting him.

"Very well. Hold on to it a minute. I want to see Mr. Leonard."

"He is in his private office, and closely engaged. I do not think he would like to be disturbed."

"Oh, he won't mind me," said the countryman, confidently. "I know he will be glad to hear from his uncle Tim, and Jake Leonard, his first-cousin. You see, I know the family."

"I am afraid he is too busy just now. I will ask him if he has time to see you."

"Now, there ain't no use for that in the world. I won't trouble him a bit. Wouldn't like to get back to Bucks county without I could tell Jake that I'd had a talk with his relation. Ain't this the office?"

"Yes," said the clerk, doubtfully.

"I'll drop in then. There ain't no use standing on such ceremony."

A repressed laugh ran through the office as the simple-minded but persistent customer opened the door and ushered himself into Mr. Leonard's room.

"He's green as a cucumber," said the entry-clerk, as he returned to his desk.

Mr. Leonard looked up in surprise as his visitor entered his office, and stood looking curiously around.

"Well, sir," said the merchant, "can I do anything for you?"

"I reckon not," said the man, quietly. "Just been buying some goods out in the store."

"Ah! Well, I hope you were suited?"

"Yes, pretty well."

"I am glad to hear that. I hope you will excuse me now. I am very busily engaged. Will be happy to do anything for you though if I can."

"Are you anything to the Bucks county Leonards?" said the customer, taking a seat instead of taking the merchant's hint.

"No. I am not from that part of the country," said Mr. Leonard, impatiently.

"Not, hey? Thought you might be. There's a Jake Leonard down there, a real clever fellow. Do you know him? Maybe he is something to you."

"I don't know him."

"Well, well, it was just a notion of mine. Go on with your writing. Don't let me disturb you."

Mr. Leonard resumed his pen, taking his free-and-easy visitor at his word. The latter stretched himself out indolently, seeming to wonder at the rapid motion of his host's pen.

"You've got the regular Leonard nose," he at length said. "Look enough like Jake to be his cousin."

The merchant pushed back his chair in great annoyance.

"You will excuse me, sir," he said, "but I am engaged on important business. My clerks can attend to you."

"I think not," said the visitor.

"Why not?"

"Because I wouldn't like to post them in my business. You wouldn't like me to ask them if there's anything new in the custom-house robbery."

Mr. Leonard rose hastily to his feet, and stood looking with alarmed visage at the speaker.

"Who are you?" he asked, in anxious tones.

"Not the bird whose feathers I wear, you can be sure of that," said the man, laughing. "I called on you yesterday, and told you then that I would be here this morning."

"Not Mr. Fitler! That is not possible!"

"That is my name," said the visitor, whose face had quite lost its expression of simplicity.

He lifted the wide-brimmed hat from his head, and with it came the straggling yellow locks which had helped to disguise him.

"I've been having a look at your office hands, and asked them a few questions," he said.

"With what result?"

"None. Appearances are all correct. If there are any rascals among them they have the wit to keep it out of their looks and voices."

"Have you gained any clew to the custom-house fraud?"

"Not as yet. I have put all the sharp eyes I could on the track. It is a new style of work, and I don't know just where to place it among the professionals."

"It is no professional," said Mr. Leonard.

"You think so?" remarked Mr. Fidler, looking up.

"I am sure. Please examine that check. It is my printed form, you see, and my correct signature."

"Well?"

"It is a forgery."

"The deuce! And when did this come in on you?"

"I discovered it yesterday, after your visit."

"The plot is thickening, and is getting narrowed down," said Mr. Fidler, curiously. "Do you recognize the writing in the body of the check?"

"No. The hand is plainly a disguised one."

"Perhaps so. I am not sure. I would like to compare it with the handwriting in the custom-house entry. Can I have the check for a day or two?"

"Certainly."

"Tell me all the particulars of the forgery."

Mr. Leonard proceeded to give him the information with which the reader is already acquainted; to which his visitor listened with intense interest.

"There's a deep one at work here, but I bet he'll have a shallow spot," said the detective. "There's a traitor in your own store. I had best pay for my goods and take them away. If I act the country customer, I will have an excuse for often dropping in. Good-day. I have been long enough here."

Resuming his hat, Mr. Fidler left the office.

CHAPTER VII.

TROUBLE IN THE BASEMENT.

MR. ABRAHAM SMITH, as the country customer called himself, paid for the small bill of goods which he had purchased.

"How shall we ship them?" asked the clerk.

"You needn't mind. Just lay them by. Might have to buy something else before I go back and can have all sent together."

"Very well," said the clerk. "That will be all right."

"I've got a deal to 'tend to, you see," said Mr. Smith, confidentially. "Ain't seen my city relatives fer two years, and they're a bit riled about it. Good-day, Mr.— What did you say your name was?"

"Harvey."

"Good-day, Mr. Harvey. I'll call ag'in. I want to have another chat with Mr. Leonard about family matters."

Mr. Smith left the office, quite innocent of the fact that he left a breeze of amusement behind him.

Will met him on his way out.

"Want them things shipped?" he asked.

"Well, not just now," said Mr. Smith, slowly.

"Lay them away till I call around ag'in."

"What did you say was the best growin' potater?" asked Will, posting himself in the doorway.

"The Peachblows, down our way."

"Ain't Murphies good?"

Mr. Smith brushed past him as if he was tired of being catechised.

"I know a durn sight more about 'taters than you do, that's certain," said Will to himself. "There's somethin' underhand at work here. If I don't twig what it is afore long, my name ain't Willful Will."

"What are you doing here?" said Mr. Wilson, just

then entering. "Can you find no work, that you must be lounging round the front door? Come in. I will find something for you to do."

He spoke sharply, as if much displeased at Will's idleness.

"Dunno that I'm much afeard of work," said the latter. "Nobody round here says that. No use throwin' hints as if I wasn't ready to do what I take holt of."

"I wish no impudence," said Mr. Wilson, angrily. "People here are expected to attend to their duties, without answering back everything that is said to them."

"The folks that brought me up," retorted Will, "learnt me that what's sass for the goose is sass for the gander. Don't throw stones at a fellow if you don't want them throwed back at you. What do you want me to do?"

"To save your impertinence for the street vagabonds who were your old companions," said Mr. Wilson hotly. "Don't try it on, here. I don't want to point out your work. You can find it for yourself, or get out of this establishment, whichever you prefer."

"When I get orders from head-quarters I'll slide," called Will after him, as he was walking away with dignity. "You can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Gus Wilson. I don't keer the curl of a pig's tail for a chap like you."

Mr. Wilson turned back, as red as a beet in the face.

"I see, my lad," he said, slowly and with bitter emphasis, "that store-keeping is not in your vein. Come to the office. I will have you paid off, and will give a character for your next situation."

He was a different man, now, in his cool, studied bitterness, than he had been in the flush of anger.

"I ain't taking a discharge jist now, Gus Wilson," he said, defiantly. "Maybe you don't know who you're talkin' to, or you'd haul in your horns several feet. If you go playin' that dodge on me, if I don't put a ring in your nose that'll lead you around like a calf, then sell me out."

Will walked swaggeringly away, with a glance over his shoulder at his opponent, that seemed to have more effect on that individual than his words.

He stood looking after the boy with a perplexed air, the red gradually dying out of his visage, and a slight pallor taking its place.

Breaking from his momentary reverie, he walked hastily back to the office, paying no further attention to Will, who stood some distance back, coolly regarding him.

"That shot struck between wind and water," said the boy, with a grimace.

As he was passing the office on his way back into the store, the door of Mr. Leonard's room opened, and his name was called.

"Wonder if Gus has been at work a'ready?" he said to himself.

But the chief clerk was busily engaged at his own desk as Will went through the counting-room, and Mr. Leonard simply wished to send him on an errand to the post-office.

"Counted them Milton cloths last night and this morning," said Will. "Ain't reported yet."

"How many pieces did you make them?"

"Ninety-seven."

"I don't think you have done your work very carefully Will," said the merchant, smiling. "Here is the invoice, you see. One hundred pieces. And here is Joe Ware's tally, marked correct."

"I don't keer three cents for Joe Ware's tally," said Will, balancing himself on the arm of a chair. "I counted them goods, and here's my tally. If it ain't O. K. I'll eat an elephant. I ain't much of a reader, but I can count the straightest streak you ever saw."

"But the pieces would not fit evenly in the boxes if any of them was short," said Mr. Leonard.

"Nor they don't, neither," persisted Will, "You never seen sich packing."

"That will do, Will. Leave your tally here, and be off on your errand. I am glad to see you are so diligent."

With a flush of pleasure Will left the office and the store.

He had scarcely disappeared when his employer hastily rose, and opening the door of the office, called Mr. Johnson.

"Do you think Joe Ware was correct in his count of those Milton cloths?" he asked.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Johnson, in surprise, "I never knew him to make a mistake."

"Yet I would prefer to have them counted again. Please go into the basement yourself, and keep the account of them while one of the men removes them from the cases."

"Very well, sir," replied Mr. Johnson, leaving the office in great astonishment. Such an order had never been given before during his years of service with Mr. Leonard. There was obviously something wrong.

Mr. Johnson was absent for a considerable time, during which the merchant pushed aside his work pettishly and rose and paced the floor of his office. His mind was evidently in an unsettled state.

Will returned and delivered the stamps and envelopes he had been sent for, and passed out again to his duties in the store, with a sharp glance at his restless employer.

Finally Mr. Johnson made his appearance.

"Well, sir, what result?" asked the merchant, hastily.

"It is the strangest thing," said Mr. Johnson; "Ninety-seven pieces."

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Leonard, seating himself, nervously. "Can there be no mistake?"

"Ninety-seven is correct. There is one piece short in each of three cases," was the reply.

"This is a very mysterious business," replied the merchant, seriously. "Yesterday afternoon they were all correct. This morning they are three pieces short. What can have occurred in the night? There is no evidence of burglary. The store was firmly closed this morning?"

"It was, sir. I never heard of a stranger business. Nothing of the kind has ever happened here before."

"Never been found out here before would be more correct," said Mr. Leonard.

"Why, sir, do you think such things have been going on previously?" asked Mr. Johnson, in greater astonishment.

"I do not know what to think," replied the merchant. "May not the three pieces have been removed this morning? Perhaps a sale may have been made. I wish you would make full inquiry through the store."

Mr. Johnson did so, and returned with the word that no one had touched them.

"Call Will here," said Mr. Leonard, in quick tones. His nervous manner was quite gone.

He wrote hastily, folded and sealed the note.

"Take this to the Central Station," he said to Will. "Ask for Mr. Fidler, and deliver it into his hands."

"And if I don't find him in?"

"Inquire where he is, and hunt him up. I wish him to have it as soon as possible."

"There won't no grass grow under my feet," said Will, setting his cap jauntily. "Not on the Philadelphia pavement, anyhow."

"Come with me into the basement, Mr. Johnson," said the merchant. "I wish to take a look around."

The basement was a long, dimly-lighted room, broken here and there by iron columns which sustained the upper floors. It was well filled with cases of goods, all of which had been opened and covered again to preserve them from dampness, though the room was thoroughly dry.

The long underground apartment was closely examined, and a smaller, dark, sub-cellar, as well. Nothing was discovered. Everything appeared to be

in its usual state. The windows and doors had not been disturbed. The mystery of the loss of the three pieces of cloth deepened.

The lower cellar was devoted to coal, empty cases and various occasional necessities. Its darkened walls were well cobwebbed. Its narrow apertures for light could scarcely have admitted a rat.

Mr. Leonard returned to his office in deep perplexity and concern.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO LOVERS.

It was at a later hour that same day that our young friend, Willful Will, met unexpectedly with Miss Arlington, the lady whose acquaintance he had made the previous day.

She was walking quietly along Seventh street, a little frequented avenue, and seemed as if expecting some one. There were indications of a slight petulance at his or her failure to appear.

"Hallo!" cried Will, under his breath. "Seems to me I've seen that figure-head afore. Blest if it ain't the gal that shook me yesterday! Isn't she got up gallus?"

The young lady, whose rich and tasteful dress brought this exclamation from Will, recognized him at once as he advanced.

A smile crossed her face as she remembered the close of their former interview.

"Hope you're not too proud to speak to a fellar," said Will, as he walked boldly up. "'Tain't in the woods we are now, that's sure; but if you can box a chap's ears there you can speak to him here."

"I don't think you deserve to be spoken to," she answered, "after your conduct yesterday."

"I dunno anything I done that wasn't right to the mark," said Will with a look of surprise. "If I stepped over the line anywhere I'm jist the feller to step back ag'in."

"What did I box your ears for?" asked Miss Arlington, as Will walked gravely on beside her to her seeming amusement.

"For fun, maybe," he replied. "I couldn't see nothing I done. Guess you thought you had a country cove. See if I don't give you the worth of your box."

"Why, you are not cherishing ill-feeling, I hope?"

"No, but I'm death on gettin' square. I'll find out the chap that's sweet on you yet, and if I don't put a ring in his nose there's no use talking."

"That will do, sir," she replied, with some feeling. "We had better part here. I cannot permit you to use such language."

"Why, bless you, Jennie, I don't mean a speck of harm in it," said Will laughing. "Didn't think you'd get your temper up so easy. I can't help no more being imperdent than I can help breathing, and it don't take folks long to find that out. Best do what I said t'other day; give that chap his walking-papers and set your cap for me."

"Very well. I will let you know when I have made up my mind to that," she replied, stopping as if to bring their interview to a close.

"All right, if you ain't goin' my way," said Will. "I'd like to spend the day and show you round town a bit, but I got biz'ness to tend to, and you'll have to let me off. Good-by. My respects to him."

Will was away like a shot, leaving her surprised that she had consented to be interviewed by a shop boy, and one speaking so impertinently and with such shocking English in the public streets.

There was something behind all this in Jennie Arlington's mind. She was drawn to Will Somers by an attraction whose nature it would have been difficult for her to define, but which was none the less strong for her ignorance of its origin.

She found herself questioning the source of this unusual feeling as she walked slowly on, and was puzzled at finding herself unable to account for it.

"Ain't many gals like her in this village," soliloquized Will. "A rich and proud one enough, I'll bet, but she lets me talk to her straight from the shoul-

der. Dunno how it is but I've got a queer kind o' hankering after her. 'Tain't what they call fallin' in love. That's not my lay. But she's got the upper holt on my fancy somehow, an' I'll swow if I know how— Haloo! Wonder if that's the partick'ler chap now? There's some feller jist j'ined her. Bet I've seen him afore, too. Like to turn back and twig the cut of his jib, but it wouldn't be on the square. Guess I'll toddle on."

The person who had joined the young lady was a gentleman of attractive appearance. He was of good build, and had an engaging face, the expression of his full gray eyes and well formed mouth being that of great frankness. He was dressed neatly, but with no effort at display.

Their greeting displayed much warmth, and an animated conversation ensued between them. A half-hour afterward found them enjoying ices in a neighboring restaurant, and still busily conversing.

"And when will you be out to see me, John?" she asked, with a look in her eyes as if her heart hung upon his answer.

"Not for a week or so," he replied, in a rich baritone voice. "I am eager enough, but we are just now unduly busy in the store."

"Can't you come out on Sunday? The country is beautiful now."

"I will do my best," he replied. "When our wedding-day comes, Jennie," he added, tenderly, "I will make a permanent engagement. Your word will be law."

"Yes, that's the way all the men talk," she replied, gayly. "Those are splendid resolutions, but they won't wear. I have been making a study of married men. How about the promise you made me for to-day?"

"The promise? What promise?"

"There, if he has not gone and forgotten already!" She shook her head in affected surprise. "The forfeit you owe me. You were to pay it to-day. Don't you know that is all I came in town for?"

"I wish you had been with me to jog my memory, for it has wandered," he replied. "I thought it was a sheer desire to see my handsome face that brought you in."

"Now, you tease!" she exclaimed, turning away. "But the forfeit? You shall not get off so easily."

"Let me see if I have not some gift for you in my pocket," he said, gravely. "It is a perilous thing to eat philopenas with a lady. I should have known better."

He emptied the contents of his pockets on the table.

"A knife, a pencil, a price-list, a button, that sure emblem of bachelorhood. What shall I give my love?" He whistled in a low tone as he ran over an inventory of his pocket treasures.

"Not a knife, for true love's sake. It is the worst of signs."

"You put trust in signs, then? I should give you a lover's knot," he replied, as he continued jokingly to investigate his pockets. "Ah! I have it. Here is just the thing. The making of a bow, which you can wear and think of me."

"I keep thinking of you without a bow," she replied. "But I will take it. What a lovely shade! Did you choose that on purpose for me?"

He had drawn a strip of delicately-colored silk from his pocket.

"I might as well take the credit of it," he replied. "I know you ladies think men are no judges of colors, but you see my taste there. Will that pay my forfeit?"

"Certainly," she replied as she twined the silk round her hand and admired its play of color. "You are forgiven. I will make me a bow that will rouse the envy of all the ladies. But there, our ice is all afloat. Mr. Price will take it as a personal insult if we disdain his ices in this way."

"And I must return to the store. The voice of the siren has lured me away too long."

"I wish you could be lured away oftener," she

replied. "You are infatuated with that stupid old business. I do believe you prefer it to me." She gave him a humorous look as they left the saloon in company.

They were now in the open street. Love-making must now confine itself to eye-glances and farewell pressure of the hands.

Meanwhile Will had proceeded on his errand, meeting with another adventure in doing so.

On reaching the crossing at Eighth and Arch streets an old gentleman was just in advance of him. There was a line of vehicles. Trying to get through between them he was struck by a horse and thrown to the ground. He fell in such a position that he would inevitably have been run over by the wheels of the loaded wagon had not Will sprung hastily forward, and dragged him off the track.

"Come, old gentleman," he said, as he assisted the old man to his feet. "'Tain't safe fer you to be walking among wagon-wheels. Hope you ain't hurt."

He was industriously brushing the dust from the clothes of the fallen man. The latter was a well-dressed and rather handsome person, though showing plainly the advances of age.

"I am not hurt. I thank you for your quickness and kindness," he said, as he looked Will searchingly in the face. "Where do you live, my boy? I must see you again."

"I ain't living now, I'm only staying," said Will, as he brushed off the last speck of dirt.

"And where are you staying?"

"Wherever folks will let me."

"Are you engaged in business?"

"Yes."

"What business, and where?"

"Running a wholesale dry good store. No use saying where, 'cept you want to buy."

"I want to know more of you, my lad, and to reward you for your kindness. Why will you not inform me?"

"'Cause most of folks think they know too much of me now, and I'm afeard that'd be your luck. And I ain't taking rewards just now."

Will was off without giving time for an answer. The old gentleman called a boy to him, and engaged him to follow his rescuer, and report at a place mentioned. Will was not going to escape his gratitude so easily.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TELL-TALE CLEW.

MR. LEONARD was in quite a serious mood as he sat that evening in the spacious library of his elegant home.

The room he occupied was charmingly appointed. Bookcases in rich foreign woods, well-filled with tasteful volumes, alternated with fine pictures and suggestive bits of statuary, gave the room an aspect which only combined culture and wealth could produce. A richly-colored carpet covered the floor. An elegant chandelier in bronze hung over the wide center-table, which was covered with delicate bits of ornament, utilized as ink stands, paper-weights, etc.

This was Mr. Leonard's favorite room. Here he spent most of his evenings, and here the family were apt to follow him, leaving the more pretentious rooms below for company purposes.

He had been a widower now for about a year, and his present family consisted of his ward, Jennie Arlington, of a son and daughter, both as yet quite young, and of a matronly maiden aunt, who filled the responsible position of housekeeper.

She was too old-fashioned to entertain company, and on Jennie were thrown the labor and the pleasure of entertainment. Fortunately none could have been better fitted to do the honors of the elegant mansion. Despite her youthfulness, she had that womanly tact which makes natural entertainers sometimes of mere children in years.

"And what ails Uncle Harry to-night?" she asked, confronting him in his restless stride.

By this title she had always been used to call him, though there was really no relationship between them. He had become her guardian, and taken her as a member of his family, at the request of an old friend by whom she had been raised, and who had left her a good share of his fortune though even he was but an adopted father. There was some mystery, known only to Mr. Leonard, about her origin.

"Nothing, child," he said, somewhat querulously. "Some business bother, that is all. Sit down to your book, and I will walk my nerves into quietness in five minutes."

"But you always leave business at the store," she said, persistently. "I never knew business yet to affect your appetite or unsettle your nerves."

"I suspect I am getting old and uneasy," he answered, with a forced laugh. "You must look for more whims from me in the future."

"I think I will take a walk, too, uncle," she replied, taking his arm. "But, you really go too fast; I cannot follow such a stride as that."

"If you get in my carriage you must travel at my speed," he said, laughing. "You are a little pest, Jennie. I wish you would let me alone."

"Your hair wants smoothing," she said, stroking his abundant locks. "Sit down and let me put it into shape. It is tossed like a lion's mane."

"Well, well, I suppose I will have to give in. A man cannot enjoy his troubles in any comfort where you are."

"It was bothers a minute ago. Now it is troubles. What will it be next, I wonder?" she said, as she hovered about him, tastefully arranging his hair. "What has ruffled you, Uncle Harry? I want to know."

"So that you can tell your bosom friends, Miss Milton and Annie Jones?"

"My lips are sealed to silence, sir," she said, with mock dignity. "It is a secret, then? So much the better. I dote on secrets. I would not divulge it for an ocean of silver. What is it? Murder, arson, or burglary? Something delightfully horrible, I hope."

She looked the spirit of mischief, as she stood over him, in her gray evening dress, her black, waving hair, and sparkling eyes in strong contrast, while a color sash, and a gay bow at her throat, broke the uniformity. It was the forfeit which her lover, John Elkton, had given her.

"I am in earnest, Jennie. I want you to be secret," he said, gravely. "Your last guess is the right one. It is a robbery that frets me."

"Robbery!" she cried, with parted lips. "Well, I declare! Was it serious? Was your store broken into last night?"

"Nothing so commonplace as that, or there would be no secret about it. There is a mystery connected with the affair which obliges us to be circumspect, lest we should put the villains on their guard."

"Well, really!" she cried, with childish excitement, taking a chair, and seating herself beside him. "Go on, uncle, I am so eager to learn all about it. Maybe I could be of some help."

"Not you, my child. It is a matter for police detectives. Even they are, as yet, at fault."

"Tell me! quick! before Aunt Hannah comes in. You don't know what a talent I have for guessing. I may throw wonderful light upon it."

"Yes, a talent for guessing wrong," he said, smilingly.

She had quite roused him from his abstraction. Laughing at her impatience, he proceeded to give a description of the mysterious robberies that had been discovered in his store within the last few days.

This relation was interrupted by a dozen exclamations on her part.

"Now that is too strange," she cried, drawing her chair round, so that she directly fronted him. "I don't wonder you are worried. The thieves must be ever so shrewd. I won't begin to guess just yet.

And such a fool, too! Those silks were very valuable?"

"Yes. They were of superior quality. I don't think there are any like them in the city."

"That may help then to find them, if they should be offered for sale."

In her eagerness she had leaned forward till her face was very near his.

"We have hopes in that direction," he replied.

"But—what—where did you get that?"

His face had suddenly become pallid. He was pointing with a trembling finger at her throat.

"What?" she asked, drawing hastily back with a frightened look.

"That! That bow! Where did you get it?" he cried, starting up, and seizing her wrist in his excitement, while he eagerly scrutinized the innocent ornament.

"I do not know what you mean, uncle," she exclaimed, drawing her wrist from his too severe gripe.

"It is a piece of the silk! of the stolen silk! I tell you," he ejaculated, in strong excitement. "You may have the clew there to the robbery. Where did you get it?"

"The stolen silk! It cannot be!"

"It is. There is no doubt of it."

This was a dreadful revelation. She sunk back in her chair, a deep pallor coming upon her face. A thousand fearful contingencies crossed her mind in that one dread minute.

"But you have not answered, Jennie."

Nor did she yet answer. Her face grew even whiter. She covered it with her hands, with a shuddering motion that surprised and pained him.

The strong man looked down upon the girl, almost cowering before him. With a sudden impulse he seized her hands and drew them from her face, looking with a searching glance into her eyes.

"Where did you get it?"

"I cannot tell you."

It was a strained, unnatural voice that spoke.

"You cannot?" His tones vibrated with surprise and dread. "What shall I understand by this strange action? Answer me! You must!"

"Oh, uncle!" she exclaimed, in agony, again covering her face. "Ask me not. It is impossible that I should answer."

"Why, are you crazy, Jennie?"

"No, no! Let me go! Give me time to think!"

"You know the robber, girl. He has been giving you part of his stolen goods. I must have his name."

"I do not know him! I could not tell you now if I did."

"Was it that boy I sent here yesterday?"

"That boy?" she asked, doubtfully, as a sudden dishonorable thought shot across her mind.

"Yes! It was he! He gave you the silk!" He spoke with a tone of conviction.

"I will not answer! I will answer nothing! Not now! I must have time to think!"

With a quick, stooping motion she broke from him, and darted out of the door of the room, her black hair streaming behind her, her pallid, scared face haunting him as if he had seen a specter.

CHAPTER X.

A CONFERENCE.

MR. LEONARD and the officer were closeted in close conversation. On this occasion the latter was in his ordinary dress. The fact of the loss of the three pieces of cloth was known throughout the store, and there was no need of secrecy in this interview.

"The whole affair is growing more and more mixed," he said, after listening gravely to Mr. Leonard. "The clew lays somewhere in your own store, but it will take time to get hold of the end of it. The parties are very shrewd."

"I can scarcely imagine any of my young men as being dishonest," said the merchant. "I have trusted them all, time and again."

"And perhaps been robbed for years past. There is an accomplice here, I tell you, of some party of rascals outside. Have you had your books looked over to learn if there have been former robberies of this kind?"

"No, but I will," was the energetic answer.

"We have been able, so far, to get no trace of the custom-house robbers. The only description to be had of them might apply to fifty persons we meet every day. They are not professionals; that I am sure of. These are outside hands, but very keen ones."

"And the forged check?"

"Was presented by the same person," replied the officer. "The bank teller has no recollection of the party, but the handwriting in the check and in the warehouse entry are the same."

"It is strange—very strange," said Mr. Leonard, abstractedly, as he selected several invoices from a pile of them he had taken from his safe.

"I am going to try the suggestion you just made," he said, proceeding to the door.

"Harry!" he called, into the counting-room.

One of the clerks responded, coming into the room.

"I wish you to take these invoices," said the merchant, "and compare them with the sales of these special goods. They are the first we have had of these styles, and the salesbook should show whether they have all been disposed of or not."

"I will," said Harry, leaving the office. His tone expressed surprise at this request.

"We will soon have that matter tested," said Mr. Leonard. "Those are the only goods I can think of which we have lately commenced to sell."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Wilson.

"Excuse me," he said, coolly. "I did not know you were engaged. I have just been down to see Clakton."

"That will rest," said Mr. Leonard. "Sit down. We were talking over the mysterious robbery."

"Is there any clew yet?" he asked, earnestly.

"Not a shadow," said Mr. Fidler. "There is only this much very likely; that the thief is in this store."

"Can that be possible?" said Wilson, with perfect coolness. "And all here have been so fully trusted. I fancy my suspicion of that boy will prove a just one, in the end."

"I fear it may," replied Mr. Leonard.

"I have not even let you escape in my investigations," said the officer, addressing Mr. Wilson.

"What do you mean?" asked the latter, hastily, with a slight tinge of color.

"I mean simply to turn every stone that lies in my way and see what is under it," said the officer, fixing his eyes upon him. "You were one of the parties having access to that safe, and control of the stolen warehouse order."

"But I was absent from the city in Harrisburg," replied Mr. Wilson, a little hotly. "Did you trace any guilt to me?"

"I merely wrote to Harrisburg, to inquire if a man named Miles Sartain had died and been buried on certain days named, and if one Augustus Wilson had attended the funeral; that is all."

"You were inquisitive, indeed," said Wilson, in a light tone. "I was there."

"Yes. So I have learned. You must remember, sir, that I know nobody in this matter. If I got you in my vise, I would squeeze you as tightly as the meanest man in the store."

"I hope to keep out of your vise, then," said Wilson, laughing.

"So, as the case now stands," said Mr. Leonard, "we have absolutely no clew?"

"We have hold of one or two threads only, but there is nothing visible yet at the ends of them."

"I have been more fortunate, then. I have found some positive evidence."

"How is that?" asked Mr. Fidler, quickly. He was at once full of eager attention.

"I have traced a piece of the silk into the posses-

sion of a member of my own household. No less a person than my ward, Miss Arlington."

"Ha!" cried Mr. Wilson, in deep surprise. "How in the world did she obtain it?"

"She had learned my suspicions first, and refused to tell me. There was some one she evidently did not wish to implicate. Remember that I tell you this in confidence. It is to go no further, except as I may direct."

"Then, why mention it at all, if you are not ready to make use of it?" asked the officer.

"Because I want your suggestions. I will not press her to reveal her secret, but we may guess at it."

"It is a mighty odd thing. A bit of the silk strayed a ready into your own house. Was she using it in any way?"

"Yes, as a bow."

"Then she didn't fancy there was anything wrong about it. She may have bought it. Is there no other silk of the same pattern in the city?"

"There is not."

"Very odd that she should make a secret of it."

"Could she have communicated with any person from the store?" asked Mr. Wilson.

"With nobody, I think, except the boy, Will. I sent him out to my house the other day, and he had an interview with her."

"It is just as I thought. Everything points to that boy," said Wilson.

"I thought so myself," said Mr. Leonard. "I expressed my doubts of the boy, and she made no denial."

"Did she admit anything?" asked the officer.

"No. She would not answer."

"The boy may be used as a scapegoat. When did you first see the bow?"

"Last evening."

"And has the lady been away from home since the robbery?"

"She was in the city yesterday."

"Now we are coming to it," said Mr. Fidler, straightening himself up. "Who is there in the city that she would be likely to wish to screen in such a case? What bosom friend among the ladies, or what particular friend among the gentlemen?"

"Miss Arlington is engaged to be married. The gentleman is in business in the city. But he is above suspicion."

"What a very poor detective you would make," said Mr. Fidler, impatiently. "It is the theory of our office, sir, that nobody is above suspicion. This man may be as innocent as she is. What we want is to trace where he got the silk. Who is he?"

"His name is John Elkton. He holds a position as principal salesman in the store of White & Bradley."

"What time yesterday was Miss Arlington in the city?"

"In the afternoon. Probably from two to five."

"You must find out more definitely. I will try and learn at what hours yesterday Mr. Elkton was out of the store. We need to establish the fact of an interview."

"I don't think there is much doubt of that."

"I want to have no doubt of it. This matter must be traced from Miss Arlington to somebody that we can handle without gloves."

"You will find nothing wrong about John Elkton," said Mr. Leonard, decisively. "You may imagine that I knew him well before consenting to this engagement. Had I thought that the silk came from him I would not have spoken of it."

"You are sure it was your silk?"

"Positively sure."

"Then you would have acted very foolishly. Little headway we would make if we were so tender of people as that. Here is a positive clew, and you would throw it away because you know the man it points to. We want to see it pointing somewhere. If he can put us on another track well and good. If he cannot, the worse for him."

Mr. Leonard looked as if something had left a bad taste in his mouth.

"That is all we can do just now," said the officer. "I would like to take a turn in your cellar. That cloth robbery is the strangest part of the whole business."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CELLAR

MR. LEONARD and his visitor proceeded together to the basement of the establishment. They were followed by Mr. Wilson.

The officer paused on reaching the foot of the stairs, and took a general view of the long room.

"You keep some valuable goods down here?" he asked.

"Not our most valuable."

"Have any of these other cases been examined? Your visitors may not have confined their attention to the one line of goods."

"No. They were all broken, and would not show tampering so easily. Had I better have them all examined?"

"That you'll have to settle yourself," said Mr. Fidler, smiling. "It might be best for your peace of mind not to know all you have lost."

He was walking now down the room, his keen eyes wandering from side to side, noting every detail.

"Do those goods come in that rumpled condition?" he asked, stopping beside a case of light dress goods.

"They don't look as smooth as they might, that's a fact," said Wilson, as he partly opened a roll of the stuff. It was somewhat creased and wrinkled.

They had fallen upon a portion of Will's bed which he had rolled up again rather hastily.

"I think I will have these few cases recounted," said Mr. Leonard. "They are new goods, and we can easily tell what sales have been made from them. Send Mr. Brown down here, and Will," he called up the stairs.

While he was waiting for the appearance of these parties, and putting them to work, Mr. Fidler walked on, continuing his investigation. He examined the windows at the end of the room with the greatest care.

"The thieves did not enter by the windows, that's clear," said the officer. "What arrangements have you in front?"

"An elevator to lower goods down."

"Opening on Market street?"

"Yes."

"And how secured?"

"By iron doors, which are locked at night."

"That could not be safely used," said the officer, "even if left unlocked. Market street is too public, at any hour of the night, for heavy operations like these. The door at the head of the stairs is always locked at night?"

"I think so. Those are my orders," said Mr. Leonard, joining them.

The officer had proceeded to the front of the store and was examining the elevator.

"No chance there," he said.

"But, how then did they enter?" asked Mr. Leonard, anxiously. "They must have found some means of access from without."

"They must have made entry into the store in some way, and then have worked down into the cellar."

"We have examined the doors and windows. They do not seem to have been tampered with."

"I will take a look at them," said the officer.

"Who opens the store in the morning?"

"Mr. Brown, the man you see at work there, usually."

"And closes it at night, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Does anybody else carry the keys?"

"Occasionally. But Brown had them on the night of the robbery."

"It's a mighty odd business," said the officer.

He walked back past where Mr. Brown and Will were busily engaged counting the goods. Mr. Fidler eyed the man closely. It was Will's old enemy, but they were amicably engaged now. A nervous, quick-motivated, sharp-speaking person, whose worst fault was his temper.

"I think Brown is all right," was the officer's silent comment, after a long look at the man's face.

"You have a cellar under this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilson. "Devoted to coal, empty boxes, and rubbish generally. It has no entrance, except from here."

"We will go down," said the officer.

"It is rather dark there," said Mr. Leonard. "We will need a light. Will, get a lamp, and follow us into the cellar."

"All right," said Will, dropping a piece of goods with a thump on the floor. "I'll put you through."

They proceeded to the sub-cellar, Will following down the stairs with a lighted lamp. It was a long, dark room, imperfectly lighted by two very narrow windows at the back. In front a coal vault extended under the pavement. This was empty now of coal, and its iron grating fastened from within.

As Mr. Wilson had said, the cellar was half-filled with rubbish. Its stone walls had been whitewashed, but were brown enough now, their mortar eaten with dampness. The earth floor was rather yielding, as if from dampness.

Mr. Fidler's eyes noted everything, as he walked slowly back.

"Bring the light here," he said, at length, as they came near the rear wall. He stooped and picked up something from the floor.

"Who made those footprints?" he asked, pointing to two very faint indentations in an unusually soft portion of the floor.

They all looked down with interest, Will holding the light close. The shape of a foot could be plainly made out.

"That's a regular Robinson Crusoe find," said Will. "If we was only on a desert island now we might look for Injuns, or such customers."

"Here we can look for rogues," said the officer. "It is a small foot," he continued, examining with great care.

"About the size of the boy's shoe," said Wilson, looking sharply at Will's feet. "Set your foot here."

"Oh, you dry up," said Will, angrily. "I ain't measuring feet now. Maybe I made it. I was down here yesterday. So was more of the men."

"No impudence, Will," said Mr. Leonard, reprovingly.

"Can't help it," said Will, defiantly. "Impudence was born in me, and it will work loose. Can't keep it down."

He turned away with a vexed shrug, and walked toward where something had attracted his attention.

"Who dropped this?" asked the officer, displaying the object he had picked up.

It was a small copper token, about the size of a nickel cent.

"That's mine," said Will, returning.

"Then you were down here," said Wilson. "And those are your footprints."

"I didn't say they weren't," said Will, indifferently.

"Then why do you object to measuring?"

"'Cause that would look too much as if I was taking my measure for a thief. That's a game I ain't playing. S'pose I mought have made the steps, 'cause I was down here."

Mr. Fidler was closely examining the remainder of the cellar.

"Everything seems right here," he said. "A rat could hardly get into this place. What's that you have?" he asked, addressing Will.

"A bit of paper I found while you was talkin' here. Picked it up from under the box."

It was a strip of writing paper which Will handed the officer, seemingly a fragment of a letter.

The latter examined it by the light of the lamp. It contained a few lines of writing.

His countenance changed as he slowly read the faintly-written correspondence.

"Read it," said the officer, handing it to Mr. Leonard.

"— Monday, at sharp 8. Black-eyed Joe's mill the crib. The swag is safe, and samples put out. They are fighting shy. Now's our time to shove, before the scent gets hot. J. P."

"I didn't ask you to read it aloud," said Mr. Fitler. "Such information had best not get to too many ears."

"Information?" repeated Mr. Leonard. "A riddle, I should call it."

"It is a riddle with an easy key," said the officer, dryly. "I wish I knew who Black-eyed Joe was. I never heard of that gentleman before. Where did you get this, Will?"

"Just under the edge of the dry-goods box there."

Mr. Fitler examined the spot carefully. There were no other suspicious indications.

"It is deuced queer," he said, reflectively, "for that piece of letter to be down here. I've been of the notion that burglars got into the upper part of your store and worked their way down to the basement. But what did they want down here? This adds a new mystery to a queer case."

"Under the supposition of a confederate in the store, might he not have dropped it by accident when down here on his regular business?" asked Mr. Leonard.

"Yes," said the officer, abstractedly.

He took the paper again, and attentively read it.

"What does it mean? It is all Greek to me," said Mr. Leonard.

"It means that an appointment for a meeting of the gentlemen who have been visiting you has been made. The Monday night has passed, or it might be next Monday. The meeting is fixed for Black-eyed Joe's, wherever that is. The swag is safe. That is your silk, which they are trying to dispose of by samples. 'Fighting shy' simply means that you are keeping the affair quiet, and it is their plan to sell the goods to some innocent buyer, before the robbery is made public. If I but knew who J. P. was, and where to find Black-eyed Joe, I would sleep easier."

Will, who happened to overhear this remark, smiled intelligently to himself.

"Bet what you dare that I find him first," he muttered. "Got a notion in my top-knot that I'll 'tend that meetin' next Monday."

CHAPTER XII.

A REJECTED SUIT.

JENNIE ARLINGTON sat disconsolately at a window in Mr. Leonard's library. She was not alone. Mr. Augustus Wilson occupied a chair by her. They had been conversing for a short time.

"It is a distressing affair to Mr. Leonard," he said. "This thing of finding himself robbed of valuable goods on every side, and quite unable to trace the thief, is a source of great annoyance, and may prove ruinous in the end."

"I know it, Mr. Wilson," she replied, "and wish I could help it."

"You may be able to do something to help it," he said, significantly.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, with a sudden flashing up.

"Simply that Mr. Leonard saw a piece of the lost silk in your possession. He seems to think that you got it from the boy, Will Somers."

"Does he?" she asked, coldly.

Her visitor's sharp glance could detect a nervousness beneath her apparent ease.

"Yes. I might have given him a different idea of the case, but thought it best to keep silent. I know,

Miss Arlington, as well as yourself, that you did not get the silk from the boy. I know, as well as you, where it came from. I can appreciate your wish to keep silent, but something is due to Mr. Leonard."

"You assume to know a great deal," she said, defiantly.

"Not much assumption about it," he coolly replied. "The thing is patent on its face. John Elkton is the man, and you cannot deny it."

"John Elkton is no thief, as you insinuate," she cried, red with anger. "I would much sooner believe such things of you than of him. I doubt if your honesty would weigh in the scale with his."

"Facts are stubborn things," he coolly replied. "I am not on trial now. He is. You must excuse me for speaking, Miss Arlington. John Elkton was connected with the theft of that silk, and I have abundant proof of it."

"You have not, and you cannot have," she answered, rising, but leaning heavily upon her chair. "If you came here on purpose to insult me, I can only say that you have succeeded, and that this interview had better close."

"I am sorry to have offended you," he replied. "I certainly had no such purposes as that. I came here to serve, instead of annoy you."

"Serve me? In what way?" she asked. A pallor had replaced the flush.

"By keeping your secret. I alone have these proofs against John Elkton. I can suppress them. Of course I must aid Mr. Leonard in seeking the other thieves, but if the proofs in my possession are destroyed Elkton cannot be implicated. It is consideration for your feelings brings me here. I know you would not wish him to be held as a felon."

"No, indeed!" she said, clutching the chair, nervously.

"I am aware of your relations with him, and how bitterly you would feel any such disgrace, as your betrothal is known to all your friends. Of course your engagement must be broken. I care nothing for him. I care much for you, and wish to save you from disgrace. Your engagement can be quietly broken and the cause suppressed."

"You are very kind, Mr. Wilson," she said, turning a quick glance upon him. "What object have you in this?"

"Nothing but your good," he replied, in his slow, steady way. "I have your welfare so deeply at heart that I would run any risk or do any deed to aid you."

"Indeed!" she said. "I did not know I had so warm a friend in you."

"You did know it," he answered, abruptly. "You trifle with me now. You affect to forget our past intercourse, to forget that I opened the secret of my heart to you on a former occasion."

"Yes, I remember your making a goose of yourself by making love to me when I was but a child," she replied, with a curl of the lip. "I laughed at you then as I should laugh now at anything ridiculous."

"I loved you then, as I love you now," he said earnestly. "I forbore to press my claim when your fancy was turned elsewhere. I believe it was but a girl's fancy that drew you to John Elkton. That dream is past now. You are a woman, and are free. I have a right now to press the love that I have nursed in silence till it has grown too strong to suppress. I have a claim on you that gives me the right to speak of my affection. I love you. You are or will be free. May I not offer my sincere affection? May I not lay claim to this dear hand? I who have so long loved you in silence and hopelessness?"

He attempted to take her hand, which she quickly withdrew. She still leaned upon her chair, with pallid face and set, compressed lips.

"When I am free I will let you know," she said, with a touch of sarcasm. "It would be well for you to suppress this sudden passion till then. I do not imagine that you will die young from the pangs of unrequited love. I despise you too much to give a

serious answer to such an unmanly and insulting suit."

She walked with a queenly step across the room toward the door.

"Very well, then," he cried, angrily. "You accept the other alternative. I will at once inform Mr. Leonard and the officers of what I have learned. Before this time to-morrow John Elkton shall be the tenant of a prison, and shall know that you have consigned him there."

"And do you think," she exclaimed, turning on him sharply and suddenly, "that I am such a weak and soulless woman as to desert the man I love because he has fallen a victim to the schemes of a villain? Nay, more, that I would sell myself, body and soul, to that villain to save my betrothed? Do your worst, sir. I defy and scorn you. I would rather wed John Elkton in a prison than you in a palace. But I believe that you are a liar and a knave outright."

"You have defied me; that is enough," he said, with a gloomy and resolute air. "But it is passion only that speaks in you. You will return to reason and be sorry for what you have said."

"Never, sir, never!" she cried, passionately. "You have put yourself beyond the pale of my consideration by your base effort. This interview has lasted long enough. I cannot and will not bear it longer."

She turned and swept through the door like an offended queen, without another look at the man, who stood there pale and discomfited, biting his lips in impotent anger.

CHAPTER XIII.

NO ANSWER.

AN old, well-dressed and fine-faced gentleman called at Mr. Leonard's store, and stood looking irresolutely down the long floor, as if in doubt whom to address. A salesman approached, supposing him to be a customer.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

"I came to inquire about a boy you have engaged here. I believe you have a boy?"

"Yes, sir. I hope there is nothing wrong about him. Has he been in mischief?"

"No, no. Just the contrary. Is he in?"

"Somewhere. He will be here in a minute. There he is now. I will send him to you."

Will came readily at the call of the salesman, who directed him to his visitor.

"Want to see me?" asked Will, demurely, looking curiously at the old man.

"Yes, my lad," was the reply. "You ran away so quickly the other day that I had no time to thank you for your kindness."

"I twig you now," said Will, vigorously. "You're the old chap I picked up from under the car-wheels. Glad to see you ag'in."

"I would like you to come to my house. I want to have a talk with you."

"Ain't got no notion of being talked to death," said Will. "Let's have it here."

"No," said the old gentleman, decidedly. "I can't interfere with Mr. Leonard's business. Here is my card. I hope you will call on me this evening. What is your name, my lad?"

"Willful Will is what folks generally call me. I s'pose that's name enough. What's yours?"

"My name is John Somers."

"Hanged if the old chap ain't got the same name as I have," said Will to himself.

"Well, I'll swim round your way some time afore long," he said, aloud. "Live out Arch street, hey? That's grandeur."

"I am wealthy, my lad, and alone in the world. I try to do some little good with my money. I owe you a debt of gratitude which I wish to repay."

"All right. I'm your boss," said Will, energeti-

cally. "Don't want no gratitude, an' nothin' else. I don't earn with my fingers and toes. But I'll get round jist to see how you live."

After some few words more Will's visitor departed leaving that young gentleman in a whirl of suppressed amusement.

Will went reflectively back to his work.

At the same hour that Will was holding this interview with the grateful old gentleman, John Elkton was holding an interview of another character with his betrothed.

He had received a brief note from her that morning, vaguely detailing the suspicions in regard to her silken bow, and asking him to meet her.

The letter had produced a strong effect on his mind. He read it again and again, the mystery remaining unexplained to him. He could only understand that he had been accused of some crime.

"What does it mean, Jennie?" he asked. "Your note is as mysterious as a Sphinx. Have I murdered somebody and forgotten it?"

"It is in relation to this," she replied, holding out the bow. "It is claimed that this silk was stolen, and they suspect you of being implicated."

"Who claims so? Who suspects me?" he cried, hotly.

"Mr. Leonard declares most positively that it is a piece of some silk that has just been stolen from him."

"This is a strange story you tell me, Jennie," he said, leaning his head reflectively on his hand.

"You told Mr. Leonard that I gave you the silk?"

"I did not!" she broke out, impulsively. "I refused to tell him. I suffered torments when I heard this terrible story, heard doubts cast on you. I refused bitterly to answer him. I do not know what he thought. He did not seem to suspect you."

"Who did, then?" asked her lover, looking intently into her eyes.

"It was his confidential clerk, Mr. Augustus Wilson. I have had a distressing interview with him. He accuses you openly of theft, and says that he has convincing proofs against you."

"He lies, then," cried John, indignantly. "I defy him to his proofs. Did he tell you what they were?"

"No. He promised to conceal or destroy them, if I wished."

"Promised! It was only a promise?"

"A promise with a proviso. I was, if I would save you, to break our engagement, to accept his love, to promise to be his wife."

"Well, that's cool!" said John, with a long breath.

"I'm to be thrown overboard, it seems. And of course you felt great pity and consideration for me, and wanted to save me, and saw no way to do it but by accepting this desirable offer?"

His tones were full of bitterness.

She laid her hand on his lips with a touch that was almost a blow. Indignation flamed into her face.

"You are not serious in that question?" she cried.

"You cannot think so meanly of me? Accept him! I rejected him with the scorn his base offer deserved. I told him Jennie Arlington was not for sale."

"That's my own Jennie," he replied, kissing her burning lips. "I knew how you would answer such a suit."

"Yet I did it with a horrible fear at my heart—a fear that he *had* the proofs, that he *would* have you arrested for theft."

"Do I understand that you thought me capable of such a crime?"

"No, no! I knew you were innocent, but I knew how suspicious circumstances will sometimes condemn an innocent man. Valuable silks have been stolen from Mr. Leonard. You have some of them in your possession. You will be required to explain how you obtained them, and to save yourself by revealing the real culprit."

He threw himself in his chair, and leaned his head heavily upon his hands. Marks of painful reflection passed over his face. She looked eagerly but doubtfully into his speaking countenance,

"Tell me, John," she said, "where did you get the silk? Who gave it to you, or how did you obtain it?" He remained silent a minute longer before answering her question.

"I cannot, Jennie," he replied. "It is a secret which I cannot reveal."

She passed over to him and took his hand in hers, looking eagerly into his downcast eyes.

"Not even to me, John?" she asked.

"Not even to you, Jennie," he replied.

She took her seat again, a look of deep distress upon her face. Was this love? This the confidence with which love should be crowned?

"My secrets are yours," he said, catching at the meaning of her action. "This is not my secret, and I am not at liberty to reveal it."

"And am I to understand, John Elkton," she broke out, "that you are the recipient of a disgraceful secret? That you are concerned with criminals? That you have made me a receiver of stolen goods? I repelled the insinuation with scorn when made by another. I did not expect to have it confirmed by yourself."

"Now, Jennie, you are hot and hasty again," he said, rising, and passing his hand over her flushed brow. "You will force me to say what I had rather not. I received the silk innocently. That is all I can say at present."

"You tell me much in that," she said, with a smile of relief. "You do not know how sick at heart I felt when I thought you were accusing yourself. I believe you firmly, John. But, suppose they accuse you? Such an answer will not serve."

"They will get no other. Not yet, at least."

But we must close this conversation, as it ceases here to interest us. Shortly after John saw her to the car, on her way home.

He had still another interview that afternoon. It was after Jennie was well on her way home, and he had returned to his office duties, that his name was called in the store, and he was informed that a gentleman had asked to see him.

He went out. The person who advanced to meet him was a stranger: a slender, sharp-eyed man.

"Mr. Elkton?" he asked, with a keen look at John's face.

"That's my name," was the reply.

"I wish a few words with you," he said, leading out of hearing of the salesman.

"I shall be happy to oblige you in any way," said John, "but excuse me for hoping that you will be brief, as I am quite busy."

"I will not detain you long," said the other, "but will do my business at once. You know a lady named Miss Arlington?"

"Yes," replied John, wondering.

"You lately presented her with a small piece of silk, of peculiar pattern?"

"Well, sir, to what do these questions tend?" asked John, reddening.

"Only that I would be glad to have you inform me where you got that silk."

"Suppose I decline to inform you?"

"I hope you will not," replied the other, coolly, "as in that case I shall be obliged to put you to personal inconvenience."

"Who are you?" asked John.

"My name is Fitler," replied the other. "I am a detective officer. I have to inform you that the silk in question was stolen. I hope and believe that you can satisfactorily explain your possession of it. But I shall require you to do so."

"I can, but not at present."

"It must be done at present."

"Must is a strong term, Mr. Fitler. I decline to be governed by it."

"Which means that you will not explain. Or else that you cannot. Your refusal gives me a disagreeable duty, Mr. Elkton."

"Which is?" replied John, coolly.

"To arrest you, on a criminal charge," said Mr. Fitler, laying his hand heavily on John's shoulder.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILL'S REVELATION.

It was Jennie Arlington's first trouble, and it was a deep one. She was proud, in her way; that rare pride which shrinks from disgrace as from a pestilence, yet is conjoined with a sterling honesty that clings to the right, even through disgrace.

Her life, so far, had been sunny, and this sudden descent into the shadow of a great cloud was doubly hard to bear. But there was in her nature powers which had never yet been developed, and which rose within her to meet this crisis in her life.

She sat brooding in the library, looking out over the bright June flowers in the garden, yet seeing only shadow there, when her reverie was broken by a servant announcing a visitor.

She turned to see the handsome face and sturdy form of Will Somers. He advanced into the room with his usual air of self-possession, his cap still on his head, and a flavor of the street Arab still about him, despite his good clothes and the lessons in politeness he had received.

"Come out to see you on some bizness for Mr. Leonard," he said, taking a seat nonchalantly.

"Well, what can I do for you to-day?" she asked.

"I want to talk to you."

"Make it brief, then," she replied.

"How about the chap you told me about when I was here afore? Sticking to him yet? I told you to shake him you know, and guess it's the best you can do."

"Is that all you have to say?" she asked, impatiently.

"Think I seen him the day I met you in town. Jist you shake him, that's my advice. Look at me, a handsome, well-built feller, and turned of sixteen. I'll be in the market after a while, and the gal that gets me is a lucky one."

"I will bear you in mind, if I run short of a lover," she replied, with a smile. "I will let you know when I dismiss the present one."

"What's the chap's name, anyhow?" asked Will, twisting round in his chair.

"Suppose I don't choose to tell his rival?"

"Ain't ashamed of him, are you?"

"Not at all. His name is John Elkton."

"What's that?" cried Will, suddenly, starting as if something had struck him.

"Why, Will," she replied, in wonder, "what ails you?"

"John Elkton, you said?"

"Certainly."

"He's a salesman at White & Bradley's ain't he?"

"Yes," she replied, with a nervous twitch of the fingers.

"Guess he's out of the market, and the coast's clear for this young man," said Will, settling himself back easily in his chair. "That chap's in quod."

"In what?" she asked, shaking him in her impatience. "I wish you would say something that could be understood."

"He's locked up in jail. Down in Moya. Took up for emuggling out of the custom-house."

Sick at heart on hearing this sudden confirmation of her worst fears, Jennie staggered back to her chair, seating herself heavily, as if a great weight had been laid upon her shoulders.

Will looked on in unwonted surprise, a faint suspicion struggling through his brain that he had gone too far. A revulsion came upon him as he saw her sink back pale and helpless, in her chair.

"Why, Jennie," he cried, with a show of emotion, "hope I haven't hurt your feelin's? Didn't calculate that you keered that much for the man. Don't be so worried. Guess he'll come out all right."

"Is it really so?" she asked, in a low, frightened tone. "Is he really in prison?"

"Yes," said Will. "But he won't stay there, so don't you worry. We'll get him out. I'll go bail for him myself."

She smiled sadly at Will's idea of going bail.

"Now hold your head up, Jennie," said Will, put-

ting his arm round her with a movement of boyish sympathy. "It's a pity I hadn't better sense; a feller that's been around like me. But I've been kicked up among boys. Dunno much about gals."

"There, Will, I do not blame you," she said, rising with a proud gesture, as if she had thrown off all weakness. "He is innocent. I know that. It is not possible that innocence can suffer the penalty of guilt."

"I know he is, and I'll clear him. Just leave it to me."

"Why, how will you do that?" she doubtfully asked.

"Think I've got my eye on the chap that's been goin' through Mr. Leonard. Got the trap set. Think I'll catch an old fox in a tight trap."

"Is that so, Will?" Miss Arlington eagerly asked.

"Whom do you suspect?"

"Never mind now," was Will's mysterious answer.

"There's more than one in it. Been spotting them for some time. Bet I bring them up with a half-hitch."

"Does Mr. Leonard know of your suspicions?"

"Not he. Nor nobody else 'cept Willful Will. That's not the way I carry on bizness. When I take a job in hand I don't want no pards. I know they've got a notion that I'm mixed in it myself, and I know who set up that job. If I don't prove him a liar, it's queer."

"You, Will? They don't suspect you of being leagued with the robbers?"

"Think they do, but they've got the wrong cow by the horns. Don't you worry about John Elkton. There won't no harm come to him. Anyhow, I'm goin' to take him out of jail, or it'll be queer."

"I hope you may be able," she said, seriously. Will's confident manner gave her hope despite her better judgment.

"I never said a thing I didn't do, and I won't go back on this," said Will, with an earnest and assured air that gave her new hope.

The boy was energetic, honest and shrewd, and his early life might have given him much experience of the criminal classes. He might then not be talking without warrant, and she felt herself leaning with great faith upon his promise.

"Guess I'd better be going now," said Will. "My time's about up."

In ten minutes more, his errand completed, he was on his way back to the store.

CHAPTER XV.

WILL VISITS MR. SOMERS.

"I would have preferred to have kept this matter quiet," said Mr. Fitler, the officer. "But that cannot be done now. The robbery of the cloths is public property, and the arrest of John Elkton has made the affair of the silks as public."

"And he still refuses to tell where he got the piece which he gave my ward?" asked Mr. Leonard, anxiously.

"Yes. We cannot get a word from him about it."

"That has a very suspicious look," said Mr. Wilson. "The man could have no object in screening robbers unless he hopes to save himself by it."

"He won't save himself," said the officer, sharply.

"It looks more like the old principle of honor among thieves."

"You still think it is some one in the store?" asked Wilson.

"The work could not have been done without an accomplice here. Have you gained any new ideas about it?"

"I am still more doubtful about that boy," said Wilson. "There has been a suspicious-looking old man here to see him."

"Ah!" said Mr. Fitler, interested. "Was he known, or was any effort made to follow him?"

"No. I was not here."

"If he comes again he must be spotted. I don't believe that boy is implicated, but we cannot afford to trust anybody."

"Why not follow the boy then?" suggested Mr. Leonard. "His places of resort and associates should be known."

"A good idea," replied the officer. "I will put it in practice. Has anything fresh turned up? Any new raid on your dry-goods?"

"Nothing. We have had no new stuffs in lately. I expect to have some in next week and will see that they are watched."

"You may save yourself the trouble. They won't be touched," said the officer, decisively. "There has been too much stir about the last for the thieves to move again so soon."

"I agree with you in that," said Wilson. "They won't be touched."

"How about the investigation of your books?" asked Mr. Fitler. "Did you trace any loss?"

"Yes. There have evidently been robberies committed before. Three or four at least. Perhaps a dozen."

"Ah! That is important. Running how long?"

"Over a year."

"That changes the aspect of things. Have all your employes been with you that long?"

"All except Will."

"That fact seems to clear Will. There will be no harm in watching him, though. I suppose you have received hundreds of invoices in that time?"

"Yes."

"Then the robbers are choice in their operations. They don't make a raid on every invoice. I judge from that this lot you expect now would not be disturbed, even if there had been no discovery."

"I quite agree with you there," said Mr. Wilson.

"They will wait till our vigilance is relaxed."

Mr. Fitler leaned back in his chair, looking closely at Wilson as he spoke.

This intent observation of persons was a habit of his. It seemed to be called forth now by Mr. Wilson's decided settling of how the thieves would act. His tone had been very positive.

"I guess it is very likely you are right," said the officer, carelessly.

They were interrupted by the opening of the door, and the abrupt entrance of Will into the room.

He laid a small package on the table.

"Mr. Thompson says that's all correct," he said, nodding familiarly to the officer.

"Very well," answered Mr. Leonard.

"He wants to know, what's more, what stuff you feed your messengers on, that makes them so slippery of the tongue."

"You have been giving him some impudence, Will," said Mr. Leonard.

"Not a bit. I never give impudence," said Will, indignantly. "I jist wakened some of them up a trifle. They were loafing over other things, you see, and keeping me waiting. Now that weren't my idee of bizness, and I didn't stop long to say so."

"What did you say to them?" asked Wilson.

"I told them that if they thought I was goin' to hang round cooling my shins waitin' on them, they'd spent their money for the wrong monkey, that was all. But I didn't give no impudence."

"You came very near it, then," said Wilson.

"Bizness is about done up for to-night, and I've got some of my own to tend to. Anything ag'in' my gettin' off early?" asked Will.

"No. You can go," said Mr. Leonard.

"That's clever. Want to call on my uncle," replied Will, with an odd look, as he left the room.

"There is some hidden meaning in that last remark," said the officer, rising. "Very likely he may be going to call on the old man you speak of. I think I will track him and learn who this individual is."

Will was not twenty steps from the door before the eyes of the shrewd officer were on him. Unconscious of espionage he hurried in a rapid manner through the streets, giving Mr. Fitler some trouble to keep him in sight.

He stopped at length on the doorstep of one of the

fine houses on Arch street, and boldly rung the bell.

"Wonder what the deuce he wants there?" muttered the officer. "It is a queer place for a young reprobate like him to be visiting. Not much like the house of a burglar, that's sure."

It was more than an hour before Will reappeared. He went now straight to his home in a very different quarter of the city, leaving the officer full of wonder that a boy like Will could have business detaining him so long in an Arch street residence.

Will had found the grateful old gentleman at home, and had had a long chat with him.

There was much evidence of wealth in Mr. Somers's surroundings, and the room in which he was interviewed by Will was richly furnished, and tastefully adorned with oil paintings and other objects of art.

He questioned Will very closely as to his former life, his present residence and mode of living, his advantages of education, etc.

His young visitor, however, was not very communicative.

"Never went to school much," said Will, frankly, when this point was touched on. "Been pickin' up my schoolin' on the street. It's a rough one, but I've learnt something. I ain't worth a cent at books, but I'm good at men."

"Which is a very important branch of education," said Mr. Somers. "Your father and mother are not living then?"

"Never had none that I know on."

"That is bad, very bad," said Mr. Somers, feelingly. "No wonder that a poor little orphan like you has had a rough life. It is well that you have come through life with an honest record, after being exposed to such temptations."

"I never carried away anything I hadn't earned," said Will, "and never hit a boy that wasn't as big or bigger than me. And never took no slack from anybody, if he was as big as a meeting-house and dressed like a king."

"Brave, independent and honest," said the old gentleman, "you are the making of a true American citizen. I only hope my poor boy may have as good a record."

"Your boy?" said Will, questioningly.

"Yes, my lad," said Mr. Somers, with a pained expression. "I had two dear children, a boy and a girl, who are lost to me. I do not know if they even live. Perhaps it is better if they do not."

"That's a bad biz'ness," said Will, looking the sympathy he so poorly expressed.

"They were stolen from me by an enemy, an old vagrant who had a fancied injury to revenge. I have sought them in vain ever since. I fear I shall never find them."

"And the old vagabond?"

"He is dead. His secret perished with him."

"Well, that's bad. Don't wonder you're downhearted. Hope you'll run across them yet, but it's risky. Guess I'll have to go now."

"Sit still a minute," said the old man, decisively.

"I wish to have some further conversation with you. I owe you a debt which is not yet repaid."

"Oh, drop that!" cried Will, impatiently.

"I have taken a fancy to you aside from that. You are living in squalor and ignorance. I am wealthy and alone. What hinders me from taking you into my house, and giving you the advantages of which fortune has deprived you? I know you will amply repay my care."

"There's one thing hinders," said Will, dryly.

"I see no hindrance. What is it?"

"It's only that I ain't in the notion of being took in and done for. I've hoed my own row so fur, and guess I'll keep it up."

"But this is an idle scruple. You would feel no dependence here."

"I'd feel it in my own muscles and in my own nerves," said Will, decisively. "I wouldn't marry no gal that was richer than me, and I ain't going to adopt a rich stepfather. I went into Mr. Leonard's

store with a notion to learn bizness, and I'm not the feller to stand at the bottom of the ladder. If I haven't made my pile before ten years I'll sell out. Much obliged to you all the same, but can't see it in your light."

Mr. Somers did his best to overcome this scruple, but Will was not to be shaken. He would not eat the bread of dependence.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD COMPANIONS.

It was noon on Monday. Will spent his dinner-hour in Independence Square, a spot sacred to his old associates of boot-blackening propensities.

He had given up eating for the pleasure of interviewing. He had already had an earnest talk with some half a dozen of the boys, and now approached another, who was just entering the Square from Walnut street.

The latter was a boy of Will's own age, a barefooted, hare-armed, ragged young citizen, with a keen, wide-awake look on his not overly clean face.

"Hallo, Joe!" cried Will.

"Well, I'll be swagged if it ain't Willful Will!" cried Joe, taking Will's offered hand.

"How goes it, old crony?" said Will.

"Old-fashioned. You've been on the coast and know the ropes. Well, if you ain't got up gallus! New shoes, and paper-collar, and a ribbon on his hat! Must have dropped into a fortune."

"I am in a store, Joe. We must dress, you know, in better toggery than you want here."

"In a store, hey? Know'd you'd come to something. Does it pay, Will? Ain't it dreadful wearin'? Seems to me I'd seem like a sparrow in a cage."

"I did at first," said Will, drawing his friend to a seat. "You soon get broke in, though. I like it better than the street now."

"Is that so?" said Joe, looking at Will as at one who has made a successful voyage of discovery. "Shoot me if I ain't got a notion of trying it. I'm getting too big for this job. How did you get a place?"

"I asked for it, and wouldn't take no for an answer. I jist captured it."

"You're the chap for that," said Joe, admiringly.

"Wish you'd work me in somewhere. You must be getting to know folks."

"I'll work for you," answered Will. "It's about time you was giving up this trade. You're well posted about town yourself, Joe."

"Not among bizness folks. Know a good deal about down-towners. Ain't many cribs I haven't been in or smelt out."

"Pet I could name some what would stump you."

"Bet you couldn't," said Joe.

"I'll go ten cents I can."

"I'll cover it," said Joe, producing a piece of soiled currency of that value. "But you ain't to go on all day. Won't give you but three chances."

"That's square," said Will. "Let's see now. Where's Ned Hogan's Retreat?"

"Shippen, below Second, and one chance sold cheap," said Joe, triumphantly.

"Where's Tim the Tinker's crib? Think I've got you there."

"Not by a jug full," cried Joe, with an eager laugh. "It's on Beach street, above Brown. Guess I'll rake down them tens."

"You're pretty well posted, Joe," said Will, with a reflective pause. "Calculate to throw you on the next, though."

"Tain't in the wood," said Joe, confidently.

"It's a namesake of yours. You ought to know your own relations. Where's Black-eyed Joe's Mill?"

Will gazed at him triumphantly, as Joe sat scratching his head, with an air of reflection.

"That's my cash," he said.

"Hold up," said Joe. "Give a feller time to

think. I don't know him by that name. But I've got a notion I could nail him. Ain't goin to give up the bet till it's settled."

"Who's the man you're thinking of?"

"It's Joe Prime, that keeps the confidential house in a little street off South street. He's got eyes as black as coal, and I once heard his place called the mill. You're sold, Will. Pass over them tens."

"He's a fence, then, and keeps a stock of burglar's goods in store?"

"That's him," said Joe. "I follered some light-fingered nobbs there once, and nailed him. Pass over."

"I've a notion you've nailed it, Joe," said Will. "Meet me on the corner of the alley to-night before eight, and we'll settle."

"What the blue blazes is that for?" asked Joe, suspiciously. "Are you trying to sell on me? If you are, I'm blowed if I can't polish you."

"You never seen the day you could do that, Joe. And nobody knows it better than you. Can't say now if there's anything in the wind or no. Jist meet me there, that's all."

"I never tramp on a blind scout."

"I want you. Ain't that enough?" said Will, impatiently. "You're as curious as an old woman. Say half-past seven sharp, at the corner. I'll tell you then if you've won your bet or not. Can't tell now."

Will spent the afternoon quietly in the store, ate a hasty and frugal supper, and reached the rendezvous at the hour named.

Joe was already there, lounging easily upon a curbstone in South street. He gazed wonderingly at Will.

"Well, I'm blowed," he said, "if the feller ain't dropped his store tozzery and come out in his old rig. I can smell a rat now, and a big one."

Will was hardly recognizable in the dilapidated suit he wore and in the highly ventilated hat, which he pulled down like a mask over his eyes.

"If things works well you'll get something to cover this," said Will, as he handed Joe the amount of the bet. "Seen anybody go up the alley?"

"No, only been here five minutes."

"Let's look in, then. Show me the house."

The two boys strolled carelessly into the narrow street. It was just wide enough to let a wagon through comfortably, and ended abruptly at a similar street running at right angles to it.

It was bordered by houses on each side, of fair size for the location, but in very bad condition.

On the corner of the second small street stood a house of more pretensions. It was a three-storied brick, of wide front. The main room, on the corner, was used as a bar-room, bearing an unpretentious sign of "Imported Wines and Liquors." The name of the landlord, "Joe Prime," accompanied this very dubious announcement.

The place seemed well patronized, and the noise within gave evidence of the exciting qualities of Joe Prime's liquors, if it said little for their purity.

"That's not the place," said Will, decisively; "might as well make a fence-shop of the custom-house."

"There are other ways in," said Joe, leading round the corner.

Will now saw that the house extended a considerable distance back, with a yard fence along this second street. A gate in this fence stood very slightly ajar.

"That's the back doorway," said Joe.

"I want a squint at the landlord now," said Will, pushing into the bar-room, through the throng of loungers.

Behind the bar was a flashily-dressed young fellow with as much evil in his face as it would conveniently hold, busily dealing out liquor to his customers.

As Will stood, looking sharply through the throng of customers, a door behind the bar opened, and a man in his shirt-sleeves entered. A glance told him that this was the person who had been described to

him, and satisfied him that it was the man he wanted.

He was small but stoutly built, swarthy almost as an Indian, with straight black hair, and eyes of deep blackness.

Will slipped quietly out of the room.

"That's Black-eyed Joe," he said, on meeting his friend outside.

"What comes next, then?"

"I 'spect some folks here at eight o'clock. They'll be like to take the gate for it, but might try the front-door."

"Yes. What then?"

"You and me are to see them, and fix their photographs in our heads. You take your stand here, where you've got a set at the front door. You're posted in thieves and sich, and don't let any go in without your nailing them. I'll take my squint at the gate. I think it's like my fellers will take that route."

Will's way of taking the gate was to coil himself in a heap against the opposite fence, and to be apparently lost in slumber.

He slept, however, with both eyes wide open.

He had not been there five minutes before a man came quietly up the alley. Looking suspiciously around. He saw Will, but paid no attention to him. In an instant he had opened the gate and disappeared in the yard.

Ten minutes passed of Will's silent watch, when two men came along in company.

He expected they would pass by, but they boldly opened the gate and passed in, closing it behind them.

A half-hour of Will's silent watch had passed, and he was about to give it up, under the impression that all his birds were caged, when a fourth man came along.

Will watched to see if he, too, would pass by. He came on with a hesitating step, his hat drawn down low over his eyes, and his hand stroking his whisker in such a way that half his face was hidden.

The boy lay quiet as death, not a muscle moving.

The new-comer paused a moment opposite the gate, glancing furtively around; then, with a quick, stealthy movement he opened it and slipped in.

"Bet a goose I know you," said Will to himself, as he rose to his feet. "Won't there be ructions when I let the cat out of the bag! Guess the 'coons are all treed now. What's the news, Joe?"

"Nothing," said the latter, who had approached on seeing Will rise. "They're all lambs my side of the house. What's your luck?"

"Four foxes," said Will, pointing to the gate. "There's their hole," he continued.

He indicated a window in the second story, in which a light had just appeared. A curtain inside came down to within an inch of the bottom.

"Want to follow it up?" asked Joe.

"If it's in the wood."

"Let's shin it up that shed, then. We can climb like squirrels. It's risky, but if there's anything in it we ain't afeard of risk."

"I'm your boss," was Will's sententious answer.

There was no one in the street just then. The shed came down nearly to the fence. In a second more they were stretched flat on the low shed.

Joe crept to the window and looked in.

"What luck?" whispered Will, as his companion dropped his head.

"Bully!" replied Joe, in a like tone. "The whole four are in, and Joe Prime with them. Jist worm up this way, and take a squint."

CHAPTER XVII.

GUARDIAN AND WARD.

JENNIE ARLINGTON's sorrow had worn off, and had been replaced by a sentiment of anger and bitterness of spirit. That a man like John Elkton should be seized as a common felon, a man of the purest character and unstained reputation, to be thrown into prison on a bare suspicion, seemed an utter outrage.

She was in no mood to appreciate the reasons for this arrest, or to consider the very dubious position in which his refusal to explain placed him. She was angry with her guardian, with the officer, with Mr. Wilson, with every party concerned. Even the unoffending bow shared in this resentment. She would have taken it from her dressing-table and trampled it under foot, but on looking for it it was gone.

This discovery increased her resentment. Mr. Leonard, then, had entered her room, possessed himself of her lover's last gift to her, and intended to use it with the hope of convicting him of robbery.

She had been pale and drooping these last few days. He had desisted from asking the cause. He knew it too well, and shrunk from an encounter with grief which he could not relieve.

To-day she was red and blooming, and he ventured to compliment her on the favorable change.

"I am glad to see your color coming back again, Jennie," he said. "You begin to look like your old self again. I could not bear to see you so cast down as you have been for some days past."

"I do not think it could have troubled your mind very deeply," she replied, in a bitter tone.

"Why do you say that, Jennie?" was his surprised rejoinder. "You know that no father could feel more tenderly toward you than I do."

"I know that no stranger could have done me a deeper wrong than you have done," she replied, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Such language seems to me utterly uncalled for," he answered, with a deeply-pained look.

"Why have you thrown John Elkton into prison?" was her unflinching reply.

"It could not be avoided, Jennie. You should know that. He is found with a piece of stolen goods in his possession. He refuses to tell where he obtained it. I am very sorry to have wounded you, but could not act otherwise. If he is innocent, why is he silent?"

"You know he is innocent," she hotly replied. "There is nothing you know better. You have known him as long as I have, and as well. You know he is innocent."

"He is a man, with human weaknesses. What do we know of his life, outside of his visits here? We do not know how or where he spends his time, nor who are his associates. He does not see you very frequently."

"You will hint next that he is deceiving me," was her hot answer. "He visits me as often as he can, and I have perfect faith in his love and his honesty."

"I cannot help doubting him, Jennie," he replied.

"Doubt him!" she cried. "And is a mere doubt warrant enough for you to take such action, to injure and disgrace him, to wound me so deeply? You doubt him! If you had seen your goods in his possession it would not have given you the right to doubt him without further proof."

"They were found in his possession," he replied, hotly as herself. "He was found making presents of them. And as for further proof we have it in his silence. If he is innocent why does he refuse to clear himself?"

"I don't know. He has good reasons for it. If guilty why did he give me that silk, and so bring it directly before your eyes?"

"I did not consider that," he said, thoughtfully.

"You did not consider anything," was her bitter reply. "You acted as hastily as if he had been an utter stranger, and caught in the act of robbery."

"I think we had better close this conversation," he mildly answered. "You are hot and passionate now. When you are cooler you can better appreciate my action."

"I appreciate it now," she replied, more hotly still. "Not content with having him seized as a felon you must enter my room, search among my things, carry off that miserable bow, make me a party to this base persecution of my lover. Why did you not ask me for the silk?"

"I took it from your table, where it lay conspicu-

ously. I did not deem it necessary to ask you. Nor do I like such language as this."

"You have laid yourself open to it by your action," she answered, pacing the floor with an excitement that would not let her keep still. "I will cling to my lover, sir, whatever you do with him. You cannot turn me against him. He is an innocent, injured man. And I will not be made a party to this vile persecution. I demand a return of the bow that was taken from my room without my knowledge."

"You cannot have it," he replied, his cheek flushed with anger. "It is in the hands of the authorities, and there it must remain as evidence."

"You have robbed me, and I will not submit to it," she passionately replied. "You have shown your hand fully, and established yourself as my declared enemy. I can no longer remain under your roof. Two houses must hold us from this henceforth. I cast my lot with John Elkton. I will be true to him whatever betide, and a foe to his foes."

"Now, child, you are talking pure nonsense," said Mr. Leonard, gravely. "I cannot consent to any such madness. It would look well, indeed, to let you seem as if driven from my house."

"There would be no seeming about it. I am driven from your house. I have stayed in it as long as my self-respect will permit."

"You are my ward. My child in the law. I will not consent to your going."

"I am a woman, and mistress of my actions. I will go."

"This is madness, girl. Go where? What is to become of you? Who is to take care of you?"

"I am not friendless, sir. I can find refuge with people who will consider me before their own self-interest."

"You must not, you shall not act like a spoiled child!" he said, vigorously. "I never thought that you would accuse me of lack of interest in you. I that have done so much for you, far more than you know or conjecture. If you knew all you would not treat me so."

"If I knew all! What is there for me to know?"

"I cannot tell you now, Jennie. I have been more a friend to you than you imagine, and it pains me to have you turn on me in that way. I am more than your guardian. There is a secret connected with your life which I have been charged to reveal when you came of age."

"A secret! A disgraceful secret!" she cried. "How could I, a child, have incurred any disgrace? What is this secret? I am not afraid of it. These half-revealings are tenfold worse than silence. Does it affect my father?"

"Your father. He was an honorable man. There is no whisper against him."

"My father! You emphasize this as if he was not my father. I demand to know what you mean by these innuendoes. It is not fair, sir, to revenge yourself on my just indignation by such an insinuation as this."

"I have said too much, Jennie. More than I thought of saying at this time. I withdraw it all."

"Withdraw!" she cried, with a scornful accent. "You cannot withdraw a storm that has been let loose. Silence now is worse than the truth. Who is my father and what has he done to disgrace me? I must have an answer."

"I did not speak of disgrace. There are misfortunes that are no disgrace."

"What misfortune, then?"

"I will say no more now. I have said too much already. Some day when you are cooler, and will not think me revengeful I will tell you to what I allude."

"And meanwhile leave me to miserable conjectures," she said, sinking wearily in her chair.

"You have no occasion for it. Dismiss this matter from your mind for the present. But you must give up your foolish idea of leaving my house."

"You have driven me to it," she said flushing up again.

"You are blinding yourself now, Jennie, and wronging me."

"I don't know. I don't know anything!" she cried passionately. "I only know that my lover is in prison, that he is innocent, and that you have placed him there. I know no more, and can bear no more now."

With a hasty movement she rose and left the room, her face haunting him with its pain and reproach.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILL PREPARES FOR WORK.

We left Will and his companion on a shed overlooking a band of conspirators. The long June twilight had just passed, the sky was overcast with clouds, and it was quite dark.

Will glanced in at the narrow aperture of the window. There was less than an inch of space left by the curtain. But this enabled him to catch a glimpse of a table, on which burnt a lamp, and to see the faces of the four men seated around it.

Black-eyed Joe stood back. He had just brought up some liquors.

Will could scarcely repress a chuckle of triumph. The face of the man whom he had last seen outside was now fully displayed. There was no doubt now, he knew him at a glance.

The face of a second looked familiar to him. The other two were strangers. His companion, however, seemed to know them.

"Them's gay nobs. High-toned cracksmen," he whispered. "I know just where to put my finger on them."

The men were still conversing, but in low tones, and only an occasional phrase reached the eager young ears at the window.

"Not safe now," was the first phrase caught.

"John Elkton is in prison. He won't blow."

"The West is the best field. After this scent gets cold."

The voices now sunk lower, so that the spies heard nothing for some time.

Suddenly Will clapped his hand on his knee.

"Bet I've got him nailed now," he said, in an incautious whisper.

"Who?" asked Joe.

"The black-whiskered feller. Know him like a breeze."

The men grew still more earnest in their conversation.

"Will be in store about Thursday," came to the ears of the boys as their tones grew louder.

"And won't be looked after?"

"No, they think we're frightened off, and won't venture to touch this lot. I can give the cue if there's any change in the programme."

"We'd best touch it deep, then. We might not get another chance soon. The secret way is all right yet?"

"Yes, not dreamed of."

"That's a lie," was Will's whispered comment.

"I'll bet a cow you'll find a hornet in your box."

Their tones fell again, and nothing further came to the listeners' ears. The conversation soon after broke up, and there were signs of departure.

"Thursday night, then," said one.

"No. Friday night. They might be on guard on Thursday."

The boys slid down the shed, gained the fence, and in a moment had dropped to the ground.

"Now, Joe, we know our men, and don't need to follow them. Let's slide," said Will.

They lost no time in putting distance between them and that dangerous locality.

"Tell you what it is, Will," said Joe, leaning doggedly against a lamp-post, "there's something up. What is it?"

"Dead burglary, Joe. These fellers have been going through a friend of mine. They've laid out a plan to rob him ag'in next Friday. But I'm on hand to sp'ile their little game."

"Who's been robbed?"

"Can't tell you now. You'll know afore long. You'll get paid, too, for our fun to-night. I'll call on you soon at head-quarters in the square. Till then, mum's the word."

"We'll split then for to-night."

Will went his way, whistling his feelings in a very gay air.

He was diligent in his store duties for the next few days, being light-hearted in an unusual degree.

And yet he fell into bitter disgrace before the week was out.

It was Thursday. They were engaged in getting in an invoice of very valuable goods. These were black silks of superior quality, and very costly.

Will labored vigorously, but with the utmost good humor, at the task of getting the cases into the store and lowering them into the basement, where it was decided to place them for the present.

Yet he could not repress his overflowing spirits, and executed a break-down between the lowering of one case and the receiving of another, that excited the laughter of the men, and the indignation of Mr. Wilson, who was passing.

"See here, boy," he cried. "We don't hire you for a negro minstrel or for a ballet dancer. You've raised disturbance enough in the store already. Now I want this thing stopped. I warn you now that the next time you attempt it you will be sent about your business."

"I'm about my bizness now," said Will, as he lent a hand to the next case.

"You have entirely too much impudence, boy. I will not have these pert answers."

"Dunno how you're goin' to help it. My tongue's jist as hard to manage as my legs."

"You have got to manage it, then," cried Mr. Wilson, in sudden anger. "If not here, then somewhere else. Your insolence is getting unbearable."

"You didn't hire me, and I ain't taking no discharge from you."

"I'll see if you won't," cried Wilson.

"Now you get back to your end of the shin, and don't be annoying a gentleman at his work," said Will, impatiently. "You're worse than a bad oyster. You'd best slide if you know when your mother's pet is well off."

"Why you insolent, rascally young beggar!" Mr. Wilson could hardly speak for rage. "That comes from taking vagrants off the street. You shall get out of this store, or I will."

Ten minutes after Will received a peremptory summons to the office.

He walked back with his most independent air, entered the office, and coolly helped himself to a chair opposite Mr. Leonard, who was seated alone.

"I am sorry, Will, that there is such a break between you and Mr. Wilson. I will have to support him. You must go," said the merchant.

"What! for Gus Wilson? Not if I know myself. I wouldn't stayed here a week, Mr. Leonard, if you hadn't been a straight man. You suit me pretty well, and I ain't taking no discharge!"

"This is nonsense, boy! You will have to go," was the stern reply.

"I'll bet my next year's salary that Gus Wilson goes first!" said Will, setting his hat rakishly on his head.

"Come, there is enough of this," said Mr. Leonard, rising. "I will pay you what is due you, and hope this experience may be a lesson to you in the next place you may get."

"Set down, Mr. Leonard," said Will easily. "May be you're done; but I ain't quite through yet."

The merchant stood looking down at the independent boy with an air of surprise; he had not met such a character before.

"What have you got to say?" he asked.

"Well, the first thing is, that I ain't only goin' to spend my days here, but calculate to spend my nights here, too."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have got in a lot of fine goods, and that the thieves are goin' for them to-morrow night."

"Mr. Fittler, the detective, don't think so."

"He be blowed! He's good for straight work, but not good for a crooked job like this. I'm goin' to be detective, and to spend to-morrow night in your cellar. There's rats there that want to be smelt out. Set down," he continued, as the merchant looked incredulous. "It won't be my first night there. I've got something to tell you."

Mr. Leonard's incredulity changed to intense interest as Will proceeded to describe his former night in the cellar, and what he had seen there.

"Can it be possible?" he cried. "Why did you not tell me this before?"

"I was waiting for it to get ripe," said Will, quietly. "Set still; I ain't done yet."

He proceeded with a description of his last evening's adventure, and of his recognition of the parties concerned, though declining just then to tell who they were.

"But this is most important," said the merchant, breathlessly. "I must send for Mr. Fittler at once."

"If you do, I wash my hands clean of it," said Will. "I ain't taking no pards in bizness."

"But we need his advice."

"We don't want none of it. I tell you what we do want. We want to keep still tongues. If this thing is talked of, our dog's dead. I'll tell you this much—there's a traitor in the store. If there's a whisper gets out all our fun goes for nothing. I want to find out how them things are got out of the cellar."

"You are right, Will; I shall not speak of it."

"Nor don't look it, nor wink it, nor let it out in any way. There will be somebody doubtful of our long talk here. Tell Gus Wilson and the rest of them that I begged off, and made you promise me another week's trial."

"Very well; I shall do so. No one shall learn anything from me."

"Not Wilson, nor Fittler, nor none of them. The job can't be done if it gets in the wind."

"But how will you manage to remain after night, without its being known?"

"Easy enough. You send me away just afore six. Trust me to snake my way back."

Will then went quietly out of the office, leaving the merchant plunged in deep thought.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRISON CELL.

JOHN ELKTON had been a week in prison. His arrest had excited much indignation among his friends, who had a high opinion of his character. His silence, however, in regard to the damaging charge against him excited distrust in some, even his friends. His employer was one of these. He offered to see that John was released on bail, if he would only explain to him this mystery. But John would not explain, and did not want bail.

He was moody and unhappy in his contracted prison cell, and grew cross and nervous as the long days wore on.

One thing wore on him more than aught else. He had seen and heard nothing of Jennie Arlington. How was his disgrace going to affect her? He did not believe that she could turn from him for an unproved crime, but she was under the direct influence of his enemies, and what stories might not be told, and what arguments brought to bear on her?

He was fully aware of the natural conclusion from his persistent silence, and could not blame people for distrusting his innocence. But he had fondly hoped that she had more confidence in him, and would not turn away from him so lightly.

But as the days wore on and she came not he began to fear that she was lost to him, and to grow miserably unhappy in consequence.

Another thing seemed to annoy him. Some of his friends kept aloof from him, one in particular of whom he had had a very exalted opinion, and

whose absence caused him much mental disquiet. He finally sent a message to this man, Jesse Powers by name, with an urgent request to have him come to the prison and see him.

It failed in its effect. His friend was out of town and did not get his epistle.

It was nearly the end of the first week in prison life when the door of his cell was one morning unlocked, and a new visitor admitted.

He sat disconsolate and moody, fretting in spirit at the defection of his betrothed, when he lifted his eyes and saw her standing before him, her eyes full of love and sympathy.

"Oh, John!" was her piteous exclamation.

He sprung to his feet with new life, clasped her in his arms, and rained kisses on her distressed face.

"This is very good in you, Jennie," he said. "I have just been thinking of you, and wishing for you; but not hoping."

"You did not think I had forgotten you?" she said, reproachfully.

"No, no, Jennie; I had faith in your love. But how I did want you!"

He kissed her again, clasping her still closer.

"And what a place this is," she said, looking round the cell. "I would have been here before, John, but I was hindered. I thought, indeed, the first few days, that you would not stay here."

"How could I help myself, Jennie? No bird would stay in its cage if the door was open."

"You could open the door with a word. You know you could," she said, looking tenderly but eagerly into his face. "You are innocent. Why will you not clear yourself?"

"It looks as if I were guilty," he replied, leading her to the only chair the cell afforded. "The law and the public seem to think so."

"It is your own fault, John. You are incomprehensible. Why are you so silent? I cannot guess a reason. You must clear yourself."

"And convict others?"

"If they are guilty, yes."

"There are things that cannot be told, Jennie, and reasons why I should not convict even the guilty. I hope you will not press this matter further. I have not taken my course without excellent reasons. If you knew all, you would counsel me to do as I have done. Let that suffice."

Jennie was silent for a little, thinking. She clasped his hand with a warm pressure. His gladdened eyes were fixed eagerly upon her face.

"Let it be so," she said, at length. "For the present, at least, we will forget it."

The conversation changed. Seated upon the floor at her feet, and looking lovingly up into her eyes, their talk grew of softer themes. Their voices fell, mellowed by love. Hours, it seemed to them, they conversed in that sweet love gossip so hard to translate, so weak and meaningless when put into words.

Looks, tones, hand-pressures, form the soul of lovers' talk, and these no pen can write down. The words spoken are dreadfully prosy to outsiders; all the poetry lies in the language of lips and eyes.

"Your friends have all visited you, then?" she at length asked.

"Not all. Nearly all," he replied. "Their kindness has helped me greatly."

"Could they do less, and be friends?" she quickly replied. "I do not think much of those who have failed to come."

"I do not blame them. They might have been away, or unable to come. And my very equivocal position is a very good reason for their absence."

"It is no reason at all," she broke out. "They are no friends of yours to desert you in your extremity."

"Well, well, Jennie, there are only three or four."

"Let me know their names?"

"And why?" he asked, laughing. "Are you going to put them in your black book?"

"No matter. I want to know their names," she excitedly replied.

"Well, since it must be, it must be," he said, re-

signedly. "First, there is Ellis Branson. Have you him down?"

"Yes. Go on," she said, writing down the name.

"Harry Howard."

"Proceed."

"James Milton."

"And the next?"

"Is not that enough?" he said. "You have three good names there."

"Not enough unless it is all," she replied, with an earnest look.

"That is all the names I can give you, Jennie," he said, more seriously. "This is an odd whim of yours, anyhow. Do you know you are acting strangely?"

"Not half as strangely as you," she replied. "Are there any more names?"

"I decline to answer," he said, with a slight frown on his brow.

"There, I do believe the absurd man is getting angry," she exclaimed, laughing. "I must leave now, before the thunder-clouds arise."

"No, no! Not so soon. You have been here no time. I will smile like a summer's day if you will only remain."

"Listen to the tramp of that turnkey's feet. He is getting impatient. I must really go now."

"To return soon?"

"Yes. I am staying in the city now. I will not leave you alone."

A few more parting words, and she left the cell.

The turnkey, a young, pleasant-looking man, attended her toward the great door of the prison.

"It is a horrible place this," she said, shuddering.

"I do not find it so, miss," he replied. "As for Mr. Elkton, he is very comfortable."

"Has he any privileges?"

"Oh, yes. He gets his meals outside. And he can have his friends in his cell, and can write to them and receive answers."

"He has written to some of them, then?" she asked, quickly.

"Only one letter, I believe."

"Any answer?"

"No, miss."

"Do you remember the name of the person he wrote to?"

"Very well. It was Jesse Powers. I took the letter myself, as I had an errand in the city."

"Did you see him?"

"No. He was absent from home."

"The name is familiar. Where did he live?"

"No. 1485 North Tenth street."

"Thank you. Excuse my curiosity. Women will be asking questions, you know."

The turnkey smiled as he opened the gate.

"Jesse Powers," she said, with compressed lips, on getting outside. "That is the name he refused to tell me. I believe I am on the track of the mystery."

CHAPTER XX.

MR. SOMERS'S STORY.

"I HAVE been a very unfortunate man," said old Mr. Somers, to a gentleman visiting him. "Not that I wish to parade my troubles, but I speak of them with the constant hope of receiving some important information."

"I am in a trade where a good deal of important information comes in," said the visitor. "Perhaps I may help you."

"You are a stranger to me, sir, but I judge from your manner you can sympathize with a father's misfortune. I will tell you my story."

"I will listen, and make no promises," said his visitor, smiling.

He had called on Mr. Somers and asked him a variety of questions which some would have considered impertinent. But his manner was easy and quiet, and the old gentleman answered him without hesitation.

"I am a lonely old man now," he proceeded, "yet

I have a son and daughter, still living, I hope though I have lost sight of them for years."

"Indeed," said his visitor.

"It has been the one aim of my life to find them. I have not yet succeeded, and fear I never shall."

"Proceed, sir. Who knows but I may help you?"

"I was a poor man at the time of my wife's death," he said. "I have since acquired considerable property. I had an enemy."

"A poor man, too?"

"Yes, a mere vagrant. He smarted under some fancied injury that I had done him. He attacked me near my own home in relation to it. He was a violent-tongued man and insulted me. I was hot-tempered then and I punished him for his insults."

"Exactly, and made him revengeful!"

"My two children—mere infants then—were stolen one day, in which I was absent and my wife unwell. It is not necessary to enter into particulars. It is enough to say that we traced them to this vagrant. He was sharply pursued, but we never succeeded in finding him."

"That was indeed a misfortune."

"It killed my wife, and has made me a wanderer for years. I have constantly sought that villain and the two precious ones he stole. I have traced him, but too late. He has escaped me by death. His secret is in the grave with him."

"Where did he die?"

"Here. In Philadelphia. That is why I have settled here. I have hopes that the children may still be alive and in this city."

"This is a decidedly interesting matter," said the visitor. "It is certainly worth while trying to trace the children. What was the man's name?"

"Jake Johnson was the name he was always known by."

"Have you set the police force of the city at work on this search?"

"No, I have not much confidence in them. I preferred to conduct it myself."

"You did wrong there. A thousand men, well posted about the city, are certainly better than one man not at all posted. Please tell me all you know about this man, how you discovered him, when he died and where he was buried."

Mr. Somers proceeded to do so, in a long narrative of no special interest to the reader.

"And he kept up his vagrant habits to the last?"

"Yes, but had not the children with him. I can trace him back for some months before his death, and he was alone during that period!"

"He probably did not trouble himself with them long," said the visitor. "Men of that character, unless they can make some special use of them, do not care to be bothered with incumbrances. He has likely placed them somewhere where he calculated you would never find them."

"That may be so," said Mr. Somers, thoughtfully.

"But where?"

"That is what we need to consider," was the reply. "I should go first to the most obvious quarter. Men of his kind naturally gravitate to the poor-house. He may have dropped them in some such place. Have you searched the books of the poor-houses?"

"No," said Mr. Somers, greatly interested. "I never thought of that."

"You see where your fault was, then, in depending too much on yourself, and not calling in the detective police. You forget that it is the business of their lives to search out crimes and mysteries."

"I wish I had met you sooner. It would have been better than the detectives."

"I am a detective," was the reply.

"You are?" cried Mr. Somers in great astonishment.

"Yes, sir. My name is Fidler. I thank you for your confidence in this matter. If you wish I will undertake to work it up. I am in doubt, though, that it may be too late."

"I shall be too happy to have the services of a

shrewd man like you. I see I have done you officers injustice. But why have you, a detective, called on me and asked me so many questions?"

"I will tell you", said Mr. Fitler, "since I am satisfied, from your answers, that I was on a wrong track. You know a boy called Will Somers?"

"I know no such boy!" cried the old gentleman, excitedly. "If I did I should know my own son, for that was his name. Why do you ask me such a question as that?"

"Because you certainly do know him, and have had visits from him. It is that that brings me here."

"I do not understand you," said Mr. Somers, in perplexity. "The only boy I know of is one engaged in Mr. Leonard's dry-goods store. He saved me from being crushed under a street car. I have been very grateful to him, and have called on him, and made him visit me."

"And is that all?" said the officer, laughing. "You do not know what suspicions have been excited."

"But Will Somers, you say. Is that his name? I did not ask him."

"That is his name."

"Do you think it possible he may be my son?" asked the old gentleman, pathetically.

"It is not impossible," was the reply. "Will has had a rough life in the streets. I do not know his antecedents."

"Heaven send he may prove my son," said the old man, with tears in his eyes. "He is none the worse for his rough life. He is noble, brave, strong and beautiful. I would be glad to call him son."

"And looks like you, Mr. Somers."

"Do you really think so? I had a thought that way. That is another important link."

"Do not build too high on this chance. You may be disappointed. It is worth investigating, though."

"Yes, yes; it shall be, thoroughly. I must see him this very day—this very hour. But the suspicions you speak of. What are they?"

Mr. Fitler proceeded to give him an outline of the robberies in Mr. Leonard's store, and Will's connection with them.

"But do you think that my boy—I must call him my boy—do you think he had anything to do with them? I cannot believe it. He is too straightforward and noble."

"I believe he is perfectly innocent, and for the very reasons you give. It don't do, though, for a detective to rest under a belief. We find sometimes the most honest appearance to cover roguery. I make it a rule to follow every trail, no matter how unpromising it seems."

"You have not much faith in human nature, then?"

"Not an over stock. My experience has not been very much calculated to make me trust people."

"I trust Will, then. I wish I could see him this minute."

His wish was granted. At that minute Will was announced.

He came in with his usual easy, indifferent air, nodded to Mr. Fitler, with a look of surprise at seeing him there, and shook hands with Mr. Somers.

"Back ag'in, you see, according to promise."

"Sit down; I wish to talk to you," said his host, with suppressed excitement.

"I can take it standing up," said Will.

Mr. Fitler leaned easily back in his chair, closely observing the two.

"Is your father living?" commenced Mr. Somers, in the tone of a cross-examiner.

"Guess not; never seen him."

"And your mother?"

"Don't know as I ever had one."

"That is a strange story. Where did you grow up? What is your first recollection?"

"Come from where mighty few men care to go—from the poor-house," said Will, nonchalantly.

Mr. Somers gave a start, and looked intelligently at the officer.

"What is your name?" he asked

"Will Somers."

"Why did you not tell me that before?" he continued, a glad light upon his face.

"'Cause it was the same as yourn. Thought maybe you might want to be making yourself my uncle or something of that sort."

"I may be nearer yet," began Mr. Somers; "I may be—"

He was checked by a sign from Mr. Fitler. Will stood looking from one to the other, with growing surprise on his face. What could they be after?

"I have never heard anything of your early life, Will," said Mr. Fitler. "I would be glad to know something more about it. Have you any recollection of the man who left you in the alms-house?"

"Not much," said Will. "I've heard he was a seedy-looking customer."

"Were you alone?"

"Oh, no! there was two of us. I had the nicest little sister with me; or maybe I was the little one, for she was older than me. Poor little thing, I've lost her altogether."

Mr. Somers gave a quick start of delight as Will proceeded.

"How came you to lose her?"

"We was both took out. I've heard that some rich folks adopted my sister, and wouldn't let nothing be knowed about her. I was took out, too, by poor folks. They made me work like a dog, till I run away and shifted for myself."

"Do you know your sister's name?"

"I think I'd forget my own afore I did hern," said Will, reproachfully.

"What was it?"

"A pretty name—Jennie—Jennie Somers," said Will, dwelling affectionately on the name.

Mr. Somers sprung from his chair in intense excitement, and began vigorously to pace the floor.

Will watched him with surprise. He had yet gained no conception of the mystery; he did not know that the old man was burning to clasp him to his arms.

"I am not questioning you without an object," said Mr. Fitler, "as you will learn after awhile. I will have to carry this matter to the alms-house, and examine their books and make inquiries, before we can go further. It is a pity you do not remember the name of your reputed father."

"Who said I didn't?" asked Will. "He wasn't no father of mine, for I recollect he treated me bad. What's more, he left me there under a different name from that he carried himself."

"What was that name?" asked Mr. Somers, facing Will closely, and looking eagerly into his eyes.

"Jake Johnson."

With a loud cry of joy, Mr. Somers sprung forward and clasped Will in his arms.

"My son! my son!" he cried, "my long-lost, long-sought son! Oh! this is too great joy! Have I found you at last, my dearly-loved son?"

Will struggled in this close embrace, and looked inquiringly at Mr. Fitler.

"He is right, Will. There is no doubt that he is your father," said the latter.

With a strong muscular exertion Will pushed the old man from him, his hands firmly grasping his shoulders, and looked him sternly in the eye.

"If you are my father, why was I left in the poor-house? Why did you turn me loose on the world?" he bitterly asked.

"My God! I turn you loose! You were stolen from me by an enemy. I would have lost my heart's blood first. Oh! my son, can you repulse me, and my whole soul yearning for your love?"

A flush of emotion came into Will's face at this appeal. He yielded silently to his father's embraces. Their souls were united in that warm clasp.

Mr. Fitler bowed himself out, as if eager to escape. He left father and son, with clasped hands, seated in earnest and loving conversation.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE INITIALS.

"Is Mr. Powers in?" inquired a lady's voice, at North 10th street, No. 1,485.

"Not at present," was the reply. "But we expect him every minute. He does not leave the store till after five o'clock."

"In what store is he engaged?" asked the lady.

"At Brown & Felger's, in Market street."

"I will wait for him."

"Please step into the parlor, miss. He will soon be here."

The visitor seated herself in the small, but neatly-furnished parlor.

"Brown & Felger. That is next door to Mr. Leonard's," she said, in an undertone. "Does that indicate anything?"

Her soliloquy was interrupted by the opening of the front door, and after several minutes by the entrance of a gentleman to the parlor.

He was a tall, rather portly man, with black whiskers, and a restless, shifting look in his eyes that impressed his visitor unpleasantly.

"Mr. Powers?" she asked.

"That is my name," he replied. "Whom have I the honor to meet?"

"My name is Arlington," she replied.

"Miss Jennie Arlington?"

"Yes, sir. May I ask how you have learned my name?"

"I have heard of you," he said, with some hesitation. "You are engaged to Mr. Elkton."

"Have you known him long?"

"For several years."

"You have not been to see him in his present misfortune. He wrote to you, but his letter failed to reach you. I thought I would call and request you to visit him."

"Why, Miss Arlington," he said, confusedly. "I have really been too busy. I have felt for him in his misfortune, for John is really an excellent man. I am sorry for him."

"On what account, sir?"

"Of this unpleasant difficulty. I cannot believe that he is guilty of the charge against him."

"You should take the time to call on him, sir, if you have not lost your friendship for him."

"The fact is," said Mr. Powers, "the visiting hours at the prison come in my busiest time."

"Mr. Elkton and you were close friends?"

"Oh, yes! In a measure. I had much respect for John. For his part he would persist in feeling grateful to me."

"Yes. You had rendered him a service," she said, assuming a knowledge which she did not possess.

"Not much," he said quietly. "No doubt, though, he had reason to view it strongly. I saved his life by pulling him from the river. It was easy enough for me to do, but he seemed to think it the greatest favor."

"He had reason," she replied.

"I begin to see through John's action now," she said to herself. "The gratitude of an honorable man is a strong feeling. Has he allowed it to make him take the place of a guilty man?"

"I would very much like to call on John," he said. "And will if I can spare the time."

"You know, I presume, the cause of his imprisonment?" she asked, shifting her chair so that she could look him more directly in the face.

"Not fully. It is on suspicion of being concerned in a robbery at Mr. Leonard's."

"It is on account of his having a small piece of the stolen goods," she said. "I have learned where he got the silk. You have seen this before, Mr. Powers?" she displayed the fatal bow, which again had fallen into her possession.

"I can't say that I have," he replied, looking at it very closely.

She rose to her feet, her large eyes scanning him from head to foot. He sat unmoved, with no trace of feeling or confusion in his face.

"You know better," she cried, indignantly. "You gave it to John Elkton, as I happen to know. You will permit that man to languish in prison, rather than come up and acknowledge the truth. You must be seriously afraid of the truth in this matter, Mr. Powers. But there is nothing hinders me from speaking. I owe you no gratitude."

"There is one thing that should hinder you," he quietly replied.

"What is that?" she quickly asked.

"The fact that all you are saying now is pure guesswork. Your lover has told you nothing of the kind; and cannot, for it is not the truth. Let me advise you, Miss Arlington, not to be too ready to jump to conclusions in the future."

"I will bid you good-evening, Mr. Powers," she replied, with dignity. "I see that there is no use to prolong our conversation. I have learned all I desired."

He smiled derisively as she left the room. In a moment more she was on the street.

She walked slowly down toward her present home. She was staying with a friend in the city now, having left her home after her stormy interview with her guardian.

A familiar voice at her elbow caused her to turn.

There stood Willful Will, a smile of welcome on his face.

"Glad to see you," he said. "Late in the city tonight."

"Yes. I am on a visit here," she replied.

They walked along together, engaged in conversation. Will was insensibly drawn into a description of his late discovery of a father and of his hopes of yet finding his lost sister. Jennie was greatly interested in his romantic story, and joined earnestly with him in the hope that he would yet succeed in finding his sister.

"Did she look like you?" she asked.

"Yes. Something your color hair and eyes. And then you look something like me. I wish it would only turn out that you were my lost Jennie."

She laughed in great amusement at the idea.

"I suppose your new position, as the son and heir of a wealthy man, have changed your plans. You will be leaving the store and going to school."

"Dunno yet," said Will, indifferently. "Ain't laid any plans. Bound to find my sister, if she's living; that's one job. But I've got another job to put through first. I'm on the track of the burglars that have gone through Mr. Leonard's store."

"Ah!" she said, with sudden interest. "Have you learned anything about them?"

"On their trail. Bound to bring them up standing," said Will, positively. "Keep mum. Ain't told Mr. Leonard yet."

"Do you know a man named Jesse Powers?" she asked, eagerly. "He is engaged in the store next to Mr. Leonard's."

"Never heard the name afore," said Will. "What sort of a chap?"

"A large man, with dark complexion, and black hair and whiskers. Rather full-faced, and with prominent nose."

"My stars!" cried Will, clapping his hand on his knee, with a burst of laughter. "That's his photograph to a hair. Do I know him? Don't I! What do you say's his name?"

"Jesse Powers."

"J. P., or I don't know my own name. That's the identical chap that wrote the letter. Don't happen to have a scrap of his handwriting?"

"No. For what purpose do you want it?"

"To nail a thief, that's all. Didn't I see the very chap in a nest of burglars? What do you know about him?"

"I know that he gave Mr. Elkton the piece of silk which has been the cause of his imprisonment."

"Better and better. Mr. Elkton won't blow on him?"

"No. He is under obligation to him."

"You and me ain't under no obligation. Don't

you be worried about Elkton. Bet I fetch him out of quod inside of two days. Could you get a specimen of that chap's handwriting?"

"Very probably. I might get a note from him to Mr. Elkton."

"The very dodge!" cried Will, in enthusiasm. "You're quick at a hint. Work it on him and I'll do the rest. Bring it down to the store as soon as you nail it, and hand it to me. Ask for Mr. William Somers, and anybody will go for me."

"I will try," she answered, laughingly. "And now I must bid you good-day, Will. I believe you will find your little lost sister. Your love will bring you to her."

"You can bet I will love her amazing when I find her," said Will, as he hastened away to hide an unwonted softening at the eyes.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECRET OUT.

It was Friday. The goods taken in the previous day had been examined and found correct. Mr. Leonard, however, in accordance with his promise to Will, had kept faithfully the latter's secret.

The merchant and detective were seated in earnest conversation this afternoon, the latter in the same disguise in which he had formerly visited the store.

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Will, in company with Miss Arlington.

He turned a quizzical look upon the apparent country merchant as he politely handed the lady a seat.

Mr. Leonard looked on in utter surprise at this unexpected visit.

"I've got a trifle of secret bizness with you, Mr. Leonard," said Will, quietly. "But your friend needn't go. I guess he won't blow."

"Secret business?" repeated Mr. Leonard. "Well, as it is no secret from all present, let us have it."

"Ever see that handwriting before?" asked Will, handing an open letter to the country merchant.

"Me?" said the latter, in surprise.

"Yes, you," replied Will. "Didn't think you sold me with that toggery, I hope? Know you like a breeze, Mr. Fidler. Jist look at that letter."

"Ah! where did you get this?" he exclaimed, as he glanced at the letter.

"You know it then?" asked Will.

"Of course I do. It is the very handwriting of the scrap we found in the cellar signed Jesse Powers. The same initials, J. P. This is most important. Who is Jesse Powers?"

"He is the man who gave Mr. Elkton the scrap of silk which has consigned him to a prison cell," said Miss Arlington, excitedly. "He little dreamed that it would fall into my hands, and under the eyes of the man whom they had robbed. So it is that villains fall when most they seem secure."

"But how have you learned this?" cried Mr. Leonard. "Through Mr. Elkton?"

"No. He was too loyal to his friend to reveal it. He owed this man a debt of gratitude, and was willing to repay it by suffering in his stead, rather than injure one who had saved his life. It was I who learned the secret, and who obtained from Powers a letter addressed to his imprisoned friend. That letter you now hold."

"Where can this man be found?"

"In Brown and Felger's store, next door to you."

"This is so. I know him," cried Mr. Leonard. "Shall we arrest him?"

"We will do nothing precipitately," said the officer. "We may be enabled after to-night's work, to arrest the whole gang. If you will excuse me I will take Will outside for awhile. I wish to talk this matter over with him."

"Certainly," said Mr. Leonard.

The guardian and ward were left together

Deep silence reigned between them. Neither appeared willing to break it. At length Mr. Leonard spoke:

"You have done me a great service, Jennie," he said. "To me and to Mr. Elkton both, in fact. Of course all charges against him will now be withdrawn, and he can be released at once. I am sorry you took the precipitate step you did in leaving my house. I hope that you will now return."

"Not until John Elkton is fully vindicated," she firmly replied.

"But he will be vindicated. I could not do otherwise than I did. His refusal to explain forced me to this arrest. You must return home, Jennie."

"I have other reasons for not doing so," was her resolute answer.

"Other reasons?"

"Yes; you hinted at something disgraceful connected with me; yet refused to tell me what it was. You must explain this mystery ere I set foot in your house again."

"You would force me to a most unpleasant task," he replied.

"Be it so, sir. There are certain paths it is best never to start on, for there is no turning back."

"You would oblige me now to do you the only injury I have ever thought of."

"Proceed, sir. I can bear it, however severe your revelation may be."

"My revelation is simply this, Jennie," said the merchant, impressively. "You have no claim to the name of Arlington."

"No claim to my name?" she cried, clinching her hand on the chair.

"You were only an adopted daughter of Mr. Arlington's," he continued, as if in haste to dispose of an unpleasant subject.

"Can this be true? Who were my parents?"

"That I cannot tell you. He adopted you from an alms-house?"

She gave a quick gasp, as of a person drowning; turned, and walked to the door with trembling step. In a moment she was gone.

It was the hardest blow her proud spirit could receive. Sick at heart, she walked resolutely on, spurning the proffered sympathy of Mr. Leonard, who had followed her in alarm.

But we must accompany the reader to a different scene.

That night found Will Somers safely in the basement of Mr. Leonard's store, where he had managed to remain without attracting attention.

He did not act as on the previous occasion, but hid himself carefully away in a corner, among the numerous heavy cases that covered the floor. Here he awaited developments.

The hours slipped by and found Will resolutely awake. Sleep did visit his eyelids once or twice, but could not remain long with such a pressing weight upon his mind. After a hard fight, which lasted till late in the night, sleep was getting the best of him, and he was gradually sinking into a deeper oblivion than before, when he was suddenly and fully awakened by a peculiar noise.

With all his senses on the alert, he listened attentively. It was the sound of muffled steps, and low, cautious voices. A faint light struck through the lines of boxes and reached his covert eye.

There seemed to be two or three persons besides himself. They were evidently acting carefully, but hastily. The low, shuffling steps were incessant.

This lasted for fifteen or twenty minutes, during which time Will did not risk raising his head above the boxes.

At the end of this time the light receded, and the steps seemed to be going from him. The youthful spy rose, and cautiously followed, taking care that not a sound should arise from his movement.

The light was turned from him, and he advanced in almost total darkness. It glimmered on the head of the sub-cellar stairs, where stood, sharply defined, the forms of two men.

Will could scarcely repress a chuckle of triumph, as his quick eye recognized both these men.

Step by step he pursued the men, down the stairs, into the sub-cellar. There were three of them now. They were gathered in the corner of the cellar where the fragment of letter had been found.

The light faintly shone on several bundles of goods which they were handling.

But what was this? The goods had disappeared! One—two—of the men were gone. Only the third remained.

Will pushed more boldly forward. He had seen a man disappear in almost the same spot on the former occasion of his cellar adventure. He was determined not to be foiled now.

The light had gone. Only a faint glimmer remained. This, too disappeared for a moment, and Will drew within a few feet of the mysterious spot.

The light again shone, and at a flash the secret lay revealed before him. It shone from the neighboring cellar, through a hole quite large enough for a man to pass through.

While Will stood looking in admiration at this contrivance two large stones were pushed back into the hole, fitting it closely, and leaving Will again in darkness.

"It's a good dodge, but if you ain't sold I'm a Hoosier!" was his only remark.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

THE stores of Mr. Leonard and of Brown and Felger opened upon a narrow street, deserted at night, save that occasionally a passing policeman gazed down its dark depths.

On the night of the robbery, however, the three men Will had seen stood conversing just inside the rear door of Brown and Felger's establishment, the door standing ajar.

"Don't move till near morning," said one of them cautiously. "The police may have been warned, and we will need to be wide awake. Wait till the milk-wagons and market-wagons are on the street."

"All right. Joe can play butcher," was the reply.

"I will be off home now," said the first speaker, "and leave you two to finish the job."

The door was closed behind him as he left the store and carefully made his way along the street, seeking the deepest shadows, and keeping in close to the houses.

He stepped out more boldly after he had reached a main street. Late as the hour was, the street was not quite deserted. A few people were moving.

One of these, in fact, was moving quite closely behind the burglar, and seemed to be following him.

The latter was utterly surprised when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice sounded in his ear:

"You are my prisoner."

"What does this mean?" he cried, turning round in great indignation. "Who are you that dare molest a quiet traveler on the streets?"

"Save all that," said the other. "I know what I am doing, and am going to put you in safe keeping for to-night."

The other continued his remonstrances, but was forced along by the officer, who still held him by the shoulder, and refused to make any further reply to his remarks.

In five minutes he had him within the strong walls of the station-house, and safely locked up in a cell.

"That's one of them bagged," he said.

Daylight was faintly showing in the east, and the occasional rumble of wagons had been for some time audible in the streets, when a light team stopped at the rear of Brown and Felger's.

For ten minutes the driver, and the two persons inside this establishment, were busy in removing rolls of goods to the wagon.

Then the door was closed, a key turned in it, and

the driver and one of the burglars entered the wagon, which drove away.

The bearer of the key moved hastily from the locality, in the opposite direction.

But their retreat was not effected so easily as they had anticipated. The pedestrian met the fate of his earlier companion, by feeling a hand upon his shoulder, hearing a voice at his ear.

The men in the wagon tried to ride over the officer, who suddenly clutched their horse by the head. But he held on vigorously, and two more strong policemen sprung into the wagon, making them prisoners.

Inside of half an hour the three men were locked up in the same station-house which had been graced by their comrade for several hours. The wagon, with its spoils, was drawn into the yard of the police head-quarters.

Mr. Leonard was at once sent for, as also the members of the firm of Brown and Felger. They had been on the alert, and were at the station-house before seven o'clock.

"Have you any witnesses whom you desire to present before we hear these prisoners?" asked the police magistrate in attendance.

"Here is my principal witness," said Mr. Leonard, as Will came in with his usual easy swagger. "The officers who made these arrests are also important witnesses. I would like to have Mr. Wilson here, if we have time to send for him."

"I have thought of that," said the alderman, smiling. "Mr. Wilson will be here. Officer, bring up the prisoners."

In a few minutes the four men so lately captured were ushered into the room.

"Mr. Wilson!" cried Mr. Leonard, in utter astonishment, as he gazed on the pallid face of his confidential clerk, foremost among the prisoners.

"Jesse Powers!" cried Messrs. Brown and Felger, in a breath, and with equal astonishment.

"Black-eyed Joe, the grog-shop keeper, and Tom Quinn, one of the worst burglars in town," cried Will. "It's a pretty good haul."

"But what does this mean?" asked the merchant, in a breath. "There is some mistake here."

"There isn't as much mistake about it as you could cover with your little finger," said Will, pointing to the shrinking figures of the prisoners. "I could have told you three weeks ago that Gus Wilson was the man who was goin' through you. I have these other chaps nailed, too. There's more of the party yet."

Mr. Fidler now made his appearance, as also Will's friend, Joe the bootblack whom he had notified to be present.

The magistrate proceeded to take evidence against the prisoners, but contented himself with that of the officers who had captured them, of Will, who recognized them as the men he had seen in the cellar, and the silent testimony of the rolls of cloth, which were brought into the room and identified by Mr. Leonard as his own property.

The four men were formally bound over for trial, and retired to their cells, glad to escape the fire of accusing eyes.

"This evidence is very conclusive," said the magistrate, "so far as this single robbery is concerned. I presume you have other evidence relating to the past burglaries?"

"I have evidence that Jesse Powers was connected with the custom-house robbery, as also with forging my name at the bank," said Mr. Leonard. "Do you gentlemen recognize that handwriting?" he asked, handing the scrap of the letter to his neighboring merchants.

"J. P." said Mr. Brown. "It is undoubtedly Jesse Powers. Who would have dreamed of that man being such a villain? I hope he has not been victimizing us in like manner."

"You are safe enough," said the detective. "He used your place as a safe passageway for the removal of goods from Mr. Leonard's. He and Wilson

between them have managed to remove those stones in the wall, and make an unsuspected passage. Is your lower cellar much used?"

"No, scarcely any," said Mr. Brown.

"They could easily then hide their work, by filling the cracks of the stones with dirt after each operation."

"Could have told you their game a week ago," said Will, "only I wanted to nail them. I was locked into the cellar once before, the night I counted them Milton cloths. That's why I was so particular about counting. I seen some chaps at work that night. Follered them down-stairs, but they gave me the slip afore I could track them. Didn't want to say nothing till I had another show at them."

"It is a bad business about Mr. Elkton. I am very sorry that he was thrown into prison," said Mr. Leonard.

"He brought it all on himself by his obstinacy," said the detective. "I cannot understand now why he refused to explain his possession of that silk."

"He did it to screen his friend," replied Mr. Leonard. "It seems that this Jesse Powers saved his life once, and he would not inform on him. He sent a message to him to come to the prison, hoping to get an explanation of the matter, but Powers would not come."

"There is some gratitude left in the world then," said the officer. "Elkton must be released at once, and an explanation of his conduct published to put him right with the public."

"But how about these silks?" said the elder man. "They have not yet been sold. They must be in some hiding-place of the burglars."

"And Joe and me know just where to put our hands on it," said Will. "Come up here, Joe, and tell the gentlemen what you seen."

Joe, thus requested, began a long, rambling description of how Will had come to him in the square. He detailed their talk, and went with great prolixity through the whole story, till the time they discovered the burglars in council. Will helped him with suggestions here and there, and managed to dovetail his own story into that of his associate.

"This is a mighty important business," cried Mr. Fidler, starting up. "You boys are worth your weight in gold. We must investigate this house at once. Can you point it out?"

"Yes, with my eyes shut."

"Take a squad, Mr. Fidler, and go down and make a thorough search of the place," said the alderman, rapidly writing. "Here is your warrant."

Within the next hour a squad of policemen marched into and took forcible possession of Black-eyed Joe's mansion.

The search instantly commenced, and was speedily successful. In one of the upper rooms was a specially constructed, deep and wide closet. The door of this being forced it was found to be packed full of goods, among which were Mr. Leonard's silks.

Wagons were produced and the goods sent to his store. Then, under the leadership of the bootblack, Mr. Fidler proceeded to the lurking place of the remaining burglar, whom he succeeded in arresting.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LOST FOUND.

WILL had now given up his old residence, and was regularly located at the residence of his new-found father. The old gentleman was exceedingly happy in the possession of this strong, handsome lad for his son, and doted upon him with an affection which Will, in good measure, returned.

He told his father with much vim of the morning's events, the arrest of the burglars, and the part he had taken in it.

The old gentleman was delighted with the courage and shrewdness of his son.

"And now, my dear son," said Mr. Somers, "since you have so successfully finished your enterprise, I wish you to help me carry out my plans."

"Depends on what they are," said Will.

"I refer to your going to school. You are young enough yet to learn a business, and much as I dislike to part with you I must give you the benefit of an education."

"I've got another job to put through yet afore I tie myself down to schooling."

"What do you mean?" asked his father, anxious to know what new whim had seized him.

"Want to find my little lost sister. Poor Jennie is just like me, kicked somewhere about this big town. I'm goin' to scour the whole city for her. Bet I know her if I set eyes on her."

"I earnestly hope you may succeed," said his father. "I will lend you every aid in that search. I intend to go to the alms-house this very day, and learn if any trace can be found there."

"I want you to come with me, first, to Mr. Leonard's store," said Will. "It's about time we was telling him of our plans."

An hour later found them in Mr. Leonard's private office. Mr. Fidler was present, and there had been a long debate on the subject of the robbery.

The merchant had been apprised of Will's good fortune, and met his father with much pleasure.

"I hope you intend to let Will continue with me," he said. "He is going to make a good business man, and I should be sorry to lose him."

"I may let him return to you in the end," said Mr. Somers. "At present I feel it necessary to give him an education."

"I cannot object to that," said Mr. Leonard.

"I want to find my lost sister, Jennie, afore I strike into anything else," said Will.

"Jennie. Was that her name?" asked Mr. Leonard, curiously.

"Yes," said Mr. Somers.

"I have made inquiries at the alms-house," continued Mr. Fidler, "as I promised you to do. They have a record there of the admission of two children, William and Jennie Somers, with date given. There is only one other record about them. Will ran away a few years afterward, and Jennie was adopted by a party who refused to let his name go upon the record. He wished to hide all trace of her origin."

"But the date is there," said Mr. Leonard, in some excitement. "What date is given?"

"The 3d of September, 18—."

The merchant hastily rose and seized his hat.

"Come with me," he said, briefly.

He led the way through the store and into the street at a rapid pace, giving no intimation of his object, but evidently in a state of growing excitement.

He continued at this pace for a considerable distance through the streets, finally stopping before a private house in a fashionable locality.

Ringing the bell with a nervous pull they were speedily admitted into the house.

Mr. Leonard had asked to see Miss Arlington, and they were ushered into the parlor, while the servant went for the lady.

In a minute she returned, and Miss Arlington was ushered into their presence. She was pale and haggard looking, and had evidently suffered much from the revelation which her guardian had made her.

She looked in surprise upon the party who had called to see her. Two of them, at least, were utter strangers.

"We have called," said Mr. Leonard, "on important business. But first let me introduce you to Mr. Fidler and Mr. Somers."

"Mr. Somers," she repeated, looking from him to Will, who sat beside him.

"I told you once that I had lost my parents," said Will, "or they had lost me, which comes to the same thing. I have found my father."

"And I have found my son," said Mr. Somers, looking proudly on his boy. "Were but my daugh-

ter returned to me, my cup of happiness would be full."

"I congratulate you both on your good fortune," said Jennie, with much interest. "I am sure you will have reason to be proud of my young friend, Will. But you wished to see me on business," she added, turning to her guardian.

"Yes," he replied, "in reference to the matter I mentioned to you at our last meeting."

A look of deep displeasure came upon her face.

"Let that matter die," she said, briefly. "It is enough to have told it to me. Do you wish to publish it to the world?"

"It need not go beyond the parties present."

"And why so far as that?" she sharply asked. "What is it their affair? I can see no necessity of this."

"I will tell you why, Jennie. I have learned something important connected with you, since I saw you last. It is necessary to broach it before these gentlemen, who are already conversant with the facts."

Mr. Somers was involuntarily leaning forward in his seat, and devouring the face of the young lady with hungry, eager eyes. He seemed to forget all present in his absorbing interest.

"Listen, then, to another story," said Mr. Leonard, quietly. "Mr. Somers here has had in his life experience the greatest misfortunes. He is a gentleman of great wealth, and surrounded with all that generally makes life desirable. Yet with it all he has been very unhappy. His wife died; his two children, a boy and a girl, were stolen from him by an enemy; his whole life has been devoted to the finding of these lost treasures. We have just learned," continued Mr. Leonard, "that the villain who carried off the children left them in the almshouse here in Philadelphia—dying there himself."

A quick thought flashed across Jennie's mind. She grew pale, and sunk back in her chair. She was beginning to guess the object of this revelation.

"They were left there under their own names, William and Jennie Somers," continued Mr. Leonard, fixing his eyes upon his intently listening ward. "The life there did not please young Will. He took occasion, after losing his sister, to run away from the institution. He is now before you."

"After losing his sister?" she repeated, abstractedly, a feeling she had never before experienced coming upon her as she continued to gaze at Mr. Somers.

"Yes. The sister was removed from the institution, on the 3d of September, 18—, by a gentleman, who was attracted by her beautiful face and charming manner. He adopted her as his daughter, giving her his name, and concealing the facts of her origin."

"Yes," said Jennie, listening to his words with breathless interest.

"On the 3d of September, 18—," continued Mr. Leonard, "a friend of mine, Mr. James Arlington, adopted from the almshouse a young child, giving her his own name of Arlington, but retaining her original name of Jennie Somers. She is now known, in her full name, as Jennie Somers Arlington, and is the heiress to Mr. Arlington's estate, I being her guardian."

Mr. Somers had risen and approached Jennie with a motion as if drawn by some unseen force.

"Can this be possible!" she murmured, resting with one hand upon her chair, which shook with nervous emotion. "Mr. Arlington not my father! This gentleman my father!"

"Yes, she is my daughter—my Jennie!" he cried. "I know her now, her face, her eyes! She is the image of her poor mother!"

He would have clasped her in his arms, but she held him off, while her large, eager eyes gazed with devouring intentness upon his face, as if not quite believing in this sudden revelation, yet drawn toward him and longing for his love.

Will, with his usual impulsiveness, broke the suspense.

"Didn't I tell you so?" he shouted. "I knewed you was my Jennie! Felt it in my bones. My dear, sweet, lost sister Jennie!"

Clasping her in his arms with a bear-like hug, he kissed her with a boy's earnest though boisterous affection, his whole face thrilled with love for his new-found sister.

"This is our father, Jennie—yours and mine," said Will, pushing her into the old man's arms. "Don't be doubting that. There ain't such another nice old father in Philadelphia!"

She yielded to the old man's embrace, tears springing to her eyes as she felt his gentle kiss upon her lips.

The warmest congratulations followed. Mr. Leonard was quite forgiven in the joy of this moment, and she turned to him with all her old impulsive affection.

"You only want John Elkton to make you perfectly happy," he said, smiling. "He is out of prison now, and I suppose is hunting this town over for his betrothed."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

A LONG and confidential interview ensued between the father and his two newly-discovered children. It was not easy for Jennie to take in the fact of her new relations. Such a sudden and surprising revelation naturally troubled her, and it was only by degrees that the last lingering doubts faded from her mind.

There was something very gentle and lovable about the old man, and she felt herself strongly drawn toward him. To Will, also, she had felt from the first a sense of attraction, which had caused her to like him despite his rudeness.

Gradually the belief strengthened upon her that this was indeed her father and her brother, and she grew very happy as she sat listening to the old man's story of her past life, and remembrances of their dead mother.

Only one lingering uneasiness dwelt upon her mind, and that was dispelled. A ring at the door, an announcement of a gentleman to see her, and she was ushered into the presence, and clasped in the embrace of John Elkton.

"Let me congratulate you, dear Jennie," he said. "I have met Mr. Leonard. He has told me of the surprising change in your relations. I am glad to learn that you have found a new father."

"Is it not strange, John?" she murmured, yielding to his caresses; "and so sudden. I have hardly got accustomed to the thought yet, though I am growing to love him. You know all?"

A shadow of doubt as to how he would view her almshouse experience came upon her.

"I know all," he replied. "You are from the almshouse and I from the prison. If there is any disgrace attaches to either of us it is to me."

"No, indeed, you brave noble fellow," she cried, warmly kissing him. "I love you for what you did. Every one will respect you that you were willing to suffer for your friend."

"How was it all found out?"

"I discovered it," she answered.

"You?"

"Yes. On my visit to the prison I learned that Jesse Powers was the man who gave you the silk."

"I certainly told you nothing of the kind!" he exclaimed.

"No, but I found it out. I am a better detective than you think," she said laughing. "Sit down here and I will tell you all about it."

John was surprised and laughed at her shrewdness, as she told how she had arrived at his concealed knowledge, and described her interview with his false friend.

"I have not been very much deceived in Jesse Powers," he said. "But I felt that it was not for me

to expose him. I owe him a debt which honor forced me to repay in the way I did."

"It was a noble action," she replied.

A half-hour afterward the two happy lovers sought the presence of the father and brother, who were still where Jennie had left them.

It was an embarrassing task for Jennie to introduce her lover to a father who was almost a stranger, although she had felt toward him the impulses of natural love.

But Will took all the trouble of the introduction off her hands.

"Ha! I've caught you now, Jennie," he cried, with a quizzical laugh. "This is the young man that I wanted you to throw overboard. Father, this is our Jennie's beau, and a first-rate fellow, you can bet!"

Mr. Somers looked with some doubt from one to the other.

"Will is right," said Jennie, in a low tone, and deeply blushing. "Mr. Elton and I have been engaged for some time. I wish now to present him to my new father."

"And I hope he may prove a dutiful son," said Elkton, as he warmly grasped Mr. Somers's extended hand.

"I do not know you," said the father, with a happy smile, "but I trust in the choice of my daughter, and in the discretion of Mr. Leonard."

"And in Mr. Elkton's face," cried Will. That's a passport to honesty."

"Thank you," said John, turning and offering his hand to the impulsive boy. "You have placed me under obligations to live out the promise of my face."

"Told Jennie once I was bound to cut you out," said Will. "Guess now though that I'll let you have her. She's a good girl. Make much of her."

"She's all the world to me," said John, turning and taking the hand of the blushing girl.

It was a happy family party which time and fortune had thus reunited, after a life of many vicissitudes, and it is time we should leave them, and seek other less happy inmates of our story.

The capture of the burglars was an event which produced a considerable sensation in police circles, and Mr. Fidler gained great praise for his shrewdness in working out this case. Of course Will's share in the business was credited to him, and quietly accepted.

A complete search of Black-eyed Joe's domicile brought to light the fruits of other burglaries. It was evident that the thing had been of long continuance, the goods being gradually sold as fast as they could safely be put on the market. The goods had been sold cheap on the pretense of being smuggled.

The arrest of Augustus Wilson and Jesse Powers was a terrible blow to their friends. Mr. Leonard particularly was troubled in mind to think how implicitly he had trusted in this man, how terribly he had been deceived.

The trial of the burglars came on in good time, and the evidence against them proved so strong and conclusive that but one verdict was possible—that of guilty.

With this verdict our story ends, so far as these characters are concerned. Severe sentences, ranging from six to twelve years at solitary imprisonment, were given by the judge, and they sunk from the surface of the living world into the slow death of a prison-cell.

All went well with those without.

Mr. Somers and his regained family were as happy as family could be, and Mr. Leonard was fully forgiven by Jennie for his somewhat selfish course in relation to herself and her lover.

This lover's attentions were more pressing than ever, and it was not long before a marriage ceremony broke the quiet of the Somers household, and Jennie again changed her name to Elkton.

Will gave up his position in the store to ragged

Joe, whom Mr. Leonard accepted at his strong solicitation. He had a better opinion of street boys, too, than he had formerly entertained.

Will proved as energetic a student as he had been in his former avocations, and made immense progress under his tutor, and at the schools which he afterward attended.

His school intercourse, too, brushed off the rudeness of his demeanor and gave his manners a new polish; a result greatly assisted by the example and lessons of his sister, who did her best to make a gentleman of her roughly-trained brother.

Fortunately Will had good sense enough to perceive the value of her advice, and to profit by it. On leaving school he went into the same business in which he had received a partial training under Mr. Leonard, and by his energy and business ability soon made himself independent of his father's assistance.

No one would now recognize in William Somers, the successful merchant, him whom we have so far known as Willful Will the street boy.

THE END.

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